





THE DISCARDED WIFE;

OR,

WILL SHE SUCCEED.

BY

MISS ELIZA A. DUPUY.

AUTHOR OF "THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE," "THE DETHRONED HEIRESS," "THE HIDDEN SIN,"
"THE GIPSY'S WARNING," "A NEW WAY TO WIN A FORTUNE," "THE CANCELLED WILL,"
"WAS HE GUILTY; OR, HOW HE DID IT," "THE MYSTERIOUS GUEST,"
"ALL FOR LOVE," "WHO SHALL BE VICTOR," "MICHAEL RUDOLPH,"
"WHY DID HE MARRY HER," "THE PLANTER'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

*"Thou knowest well what once I was to thee;
One who for love of one I loved—FOR THEE!
Would have done, or borne the sins of all the world.
But, for the future,
I will as soon attempt to entice a star
To perch upon my finger, or the wind
To follow me like a dog, as think to keep
A woman's heart again."—FESTUS.*



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THE DISCARDED WIFE; OR, WILL SHE SUCCEED?

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—A VOYAGE TO EUROPE.....	21
II.—THE ABDUCTION.....	42
III.—BROTHER AND SISTER.....	62
IV.—CLAIRE'S PROGRAMME.....	74
V.—ARMAND'S HISTORY.....	86
VI.—GETTING THINGS READY.....	113
VII.—A YOUNG CIRCE.....	137
VIII.—LIFE AT LATOUR.....	157
X.—ON THE VICTIM'S TRAIL.....	177
X.—A CATASTROPHE.....	197
XI.—LATOUR'S DEATH.....	202
XII.—THE LAST HOUR OF AGNES.....	224
XIII.—FREE AT LAST.....	233
XIV.—PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.....	241
XV.—A NEW DEVELOPMENT.....	261
XVI.—MAY GETS AN ANSWER.....	270
XVII.—THE LOVERS.....	286
XVIII.—A NEW JAILER.....	306
XIX.—A TREACHEROUS ALLY.....	327
XX.—PREPARED TO ELOPE.....	346

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXI.—THE AVENGER ON THE TRACK.....	355
XXII.—OLD FRIENDS.....	374
XXIII.—A PERVERSE CHILD.....	394
XXIV.—THE YOUNG REBEL DISPOSED OF.....	410
XXV.—AN APPROACHING CLIMAX.....	432
XXVI.—LOUISE REPENTANT.....	447
XXVII.—FACE TO FACE ONCE MORE.....	453
XXVIII.—THE WEDDING.....	475
XXIX.—THE RINGS OF FATE.....	483
XXX.—DESTINY AT WORK.....	499
XXXI.—AN ELOPEMENT PREVENTED.....	520
XXXII.—SUNSHINE.....	539
XXXIII.—CLAIRE'S VENGEANCE.....	560
XXXIV.—THE HUSBAND'S SEARCH.....	584

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CHAPTER I.

A VOYAGE TO EUROPE.

ON the return of Andrew Courtnay to the Grange, preparations were completed for the European journey, and the family set out, taking with them old Betty as their only attendant. She pleaded so earnestly to go that her mistress had not the heart to refuse her, as she was still active enough to perform the duties of a waiting woman to both Mrs. Courtnay and her young daughter.

The party arrived safely in New York, and after spending a few days there, embarked for Liverpool, on a first-class steamer. The sea voyage seemed to act as an elixir on the health and spirits of Claire, and with every mile that severed her more widely from the land of her birth, she appeared to cast from her a portion of the heavy weight of sorrow that had so oppressed her.

Bloom returned to her cheeks, her eyes brightened with their old animation, and Julia again found in her

a companion and friend, ready to share in her sports or amuse her with marvelous tales of giants, and genii, of which she had an exhaustless store in her own fertile imagination.

This was but another phase of the protean nature of this young creature, though her protectress flattered herself that she was forgetting the sad blight that had fallen upon her. Claire had only buried her passion and regrets in the depths of her heart, but above them lay the resolve she had expressed, and never for one moment did she swerve from it.

Her day would come ; that thought alone gave her courage to live—to recover from the stunning blow that had cast her down from perfect happiness to the depths of despair. She had struggled through her slough of despond, and now let him who had thrust her into it beware. She could wait, as she had said to Agnes, for she knew that she had much to do before she was herself prepared for the conflict she meant to wage.

While the voyage lasted, they had charming weather, and they were safely landed in Liverpool, on the eleventh day from their embarkation. A month was spent in England, and then they crossed the channel to *La belle France*. Andrew's conduct was extremely circumspect, and his mother deluded herself with the belief that he had seen the folly of his love for Claire, and was arriving at that equable state of feeling toward her, which would enable him to resign her, without a pang of regret.

If she could have looked in that turbulent heart, she would have seen there what would have appalled her. Claire's renewed bloom and brightness only intensified

the resolve to win her at all hazards, either with, or without her own consent. He watched her at a distance, and brooded constantly on the possibility of success, in the plan he was maturing, to be carried into effect, when he was old enough to be the master of his own actions.

He would go to Heidelberg, and remain the stipulated two years, while Claire availed herself of the advantages it was Mrs. Courtnay's intention to afford her. But that long probation once ended, Claire should be compelled to consent to what he believed would be for her own good.

Immediately on their arrival in Paris, Mrs. Courtnay made inquiries for M. Latour, as she desired to inform him, without delay, of the existence of the young sister she had brought there, as a claimant on his fortune.

The reply given to her was, that the ex-banker was traveling in the East, and the time of his return to his native land was uncertain. So, for the present, nothing was left for her, but to carry out her own plans for her young protégée, which she hastened at once to do.

Claire seemed keenly anxious to profit by the opportunities for improvement her god-mother was willing to afford her, and, by her own desire, she was immediately placed in a first-class school, where every feminine accomplishment was taught.

Her progress from the first, was pronounced marvelous by her teachers, and Claire smiled bitterly, as she thought:

“Who ever had such motives for exertion as I have? I will make myself irresistible: I will not only become mistress of a brilliant education, but I will study, above all the rest, the art of fascination. The time will come in which it will serve me well.”

She watched with eager eyes the development of her own beauty, and rejoiced to see that as time progressed, she grew into something fairer, more dazzling than her former self; that as she matured into perfect womanhood, few would have recognized in her the unformed, though attractive creature, who had caught the passing fancy of Walter Thorne.

But this transformation was the work of years. When she emerged from her seclusion, she was eighteen, and as brilliant and beautiful a being as the imagination can conceive.

Andrew had gone at once to Heidelberg, and during his stay there, his mother resided in the town, occasionally visiting Claire, and keeping up a constant correspondence with her. The third year of their stay in Europe, Andrew traveled with a tutor, and Mrs. Courtnay took up her residence in Paris.

She dreaded the meeting between the two that must inevitably take place when her son rejoined them; although he rarely spoke of Claire, and had used all his art to induce his mother to believe that his attachment for her had been laid aside with other childish things. Mrs. Courtnay felt that this bewilderingly beautiful creature, with her easy grace of manner, and her sprightly wit, was too dangerous a companion to be thrown with Andrew with impunity. He would, she knew, return to his allegiance to her, and the separation between them have been in vain.

Mrs. Courtnay one day said to Claire, as they sat together in her lodgings, in which the young girl had been received when she left the boarding-school:

"My dear child, you have bloomed into marvelous loveliness. You will be sought after by many, and you

may make a brilliant match. I hope you do not still cling to that old fancy about being bound to Walter Thorne, when he has not considered himself bound to you?"

Claire looked up with an expression of pained surprise, and asked:

"Mamma, are you not aware of the sacredness of the marriage bond among all true Catholics? With them, bound once is bound forever, unless death gives release."

"That is true, dear; but yours is an exceptional case. If ever a woman was freed from her vows, you have been by the double treachery of the man to whom you gave yourself."

Claire quietly replied:

"I do not wish to be freed from them. Why should I? Do you suppose that, after my experience, I would ever trust my fate in the power of another man? No, *my* mission is to break their false hearts, as one of them has broken mine."

Mrs. Courtney looked shocked, and earnestly said:

"Don't tell me that with your dangerous power to win love, you intend to adopt the *role* of a coquette? It will be fatal to yourself as to others."

Claire glanced at herself in a mirror, and with a strange smile replied:

"It seems to me that nothing else is left me but to amuse myself with the agonies of the lovers I may win. Outwardly, I am brilliant enough, but if you could look into my dead heart, you would understand that now my education is completed, I can have no object in life but to gain love, and cast it from me as mine was won and trampled on. My brother will af-

ford me the means I shall want, and I have resolved to stay with him. Her tones were hard, her eyes glittered with the fierce glare that sometimes betrayed the panther nature that might have lain forever undeveloped but for the fatal experience through which she had passed. That had hardened her feelings, deepened her resentments, and warped the mind which under different circumstances might have been trained only to sweet and gracious influences.

Mrs. Courtnay regarded her with surprise, and with a slight tone of pique, said :

“So you have matured your plans without even consulting me. It is well, perhaps, for all concerned, that you should remain here, but I scarcely expected you to be willing to do so. Andrew has overcome his preference for you, I believe, for he has kept up a rather lover-like correspondence with Emma Carleton, since we came to Europe. It is my earnest wish to see them united, and as you suggest, if he were again thrown with you, he might return to his old madness.”

“That is the only name for it,” said Claire, with a light laugh. “Like most other hallucinations, it has passed away ; but it will be as well to afford it no opportunity to return. *Your* son is sacred to me, mamma, and I will never cause him a pang, if I can avoid it. I owe you so much—so much that I can never repay ! The heart that is cold to all the rest of the world, opens to you and yours, and I shall ever cherish the love I bear to you as the one tender link that binds me to my kind.”

“So young, and at heart a misanthrope ! Oh, Claire, you have marked out for yourself a hard and arid path. A few brilliant triumphs, that bring no real satisfaction ;

a few years of gayety, that must end in satiety and self-contempt, and then what will be left? Painful memories, perhaps embittered by remorse—for such a career as you have sketched, is rarely free from that. My child, it pains me to the heart to think of what may be in store for you.”

“Then don’t think of it, mamma. There is nothing left to me but the excitements of gayety and admiration. I should fade away and perish in the monotony of the Grange, if I could be induced to return there. I should think only of my anomalous position, and grow wild in that solitary glen, over the memories of the past. I shall never return to my native land till my husband is freed from the ties that bind him to my rival. No—she is not my *rival*, for his heart was mine, though he consented to give me up.”

“Claire, do you love him yet?”

A lightning flash came from her dark eyes.

“*Love him?* No. Scorn has swallowed up every softer feeling for the craven who would not stand by the woman he had chosen; who meanly sold himself for a price. But he is my husband, and he shall yet be proud to receive me as his wife, and proclaim to the world that the tie which bound us together was perfectly legal. The jury that gave him back his freedom was made to believe that I was a mere light o’love willing to be deceived—to be his on any terms—and they shall yet know how much they were mistaken.”

Mrs. Courtnay gravely said:

“I think you are mad to dream of righting yourself. A life is in your way that may outlast your own; and were I in your place I should shrink from again placing myself in the power of so unprincipled a man as

Walter Thorne, even if the opportunity should be afforded."

"The power will then be in my own hands. The unformed, loving child was at his mercy; the brilliant worldly woman, with every fascination at her command, will hold him at hers. As to the poor creature, who stands in my way, *her* heart will break before my charms have faded, and then—Walter Thorne may look to himself."

Mrs. Courtney saw the expression of fierce determination on her face, and sighed heavily. What could she say to this willful and resolute creature?—how turn her from a purpose that seemed, to her, so forlorn of accomplishment?—and even, if successful, must bring to herself and another, supreme wretchedness. She softly asked:

"My dear Claire, do you ever pray to God to give you back the tender, childish heart that once was yours? You must know that the course you propose to yourself is opposed to every command given by him as our rule of action."

A faint shadow flitted over the fair face of her companion, but she coldly replied:

"I go to confession regularly, and my spiritual director imposes penance on me, when I confess to wrongdoing. If I were not a true daughter of the church, I should not hold my marriage vow so utterly binding upon me."

At that moment Julia came in beaming with health and happiness. She had grown into a slender, graceful girl of thirteen, with the fair beauty of her mother—also inheriting her gentle temper."

She held a letter in her hand, bearing the Strasbourg post-mark, and joyfully displaying it, exclaimed:

“Andrew is coming back to us, mamma. He has written to me a long letter, telling me all about his travels. He has seen so much, he will have a thousand things to tell us when he returns. Read it, and see for yourself that he will be here in a few more days. Dear Claire, I am so glad that you have left that dull school, and will be here to welcome him.”

Mrs. Courtnay glanced over the letter, and said :

“He is really coming immediately. He may be here to-morrow, for this letter has been long on the way.”

She glanced uneasily at Claire, who laughed, and asked, in a low tone :

“Had I not better go back to my school, before Andrew appears? I wish to spare you a moment’s uneasiness on his account.”

Julia overheard her, and with wildly distended eyes, said :

“What can you mean, Claire? My brother will expect to see you, and if he does not find you with us, he will be sure to seek you at the school. I thought you had come to stay with us always now.”

“Did you, pet? But suppose I have only come on a visit, and a farewell one, at that? I am going to live in France, you know. I have always told you that, and your mother speaks of returning to Virginia.”

Julia turned to her mother, and incredulously asked :

“Do you really think of going back, mamma, before I have finished my studies, too? You were anxious to come to Europe, on Andrew’s account, and now we are here, I think you might remain on mine, at least till I am seventeen.”

“By that time you would be so completely Parisian,

that you would be unwilling to go back to the old home, in the lonely valley in which you were once so happy, Julia. My affairs require my presence in Virginia. I shall take back with me an accomplished governess for you ; and when you are quite grown, I may return to visit Claire, for she refuses to go back with us."

"Go away and leave Claire ! What will my brother say to that ? What shall I do without her ?"

With a droll look, Claire said :

"Let me foretell what you will all do. *You* will occupy yourself with your studies, and model yourself on the pink of propriety, mamma will select as your preceptress. Andrew will marry that pretty Emma Carleton, who came once to the Grange, and bring her back there : and you will all be happier without the marplot I should prove if I consented to return with you."

"*You* a marplot, indeed ! How can you speak of yourself in such terms ? But what could you do, if left here alone ?"

"I shall not be alone, *pétite*. I intend to keep house for that brother of whom you have heard ; he will make his appearance in civilized life again before many weeks have passed away ; and I have settled my plans quite independently of your mother's arrangements."

"But, Claire, why can't you be my governess ? I would be the best of students, and give you very little trouble. That will be better than staying here with a strange man, even if he does happen to be your brother."

"I know that you would be the sweetest little pupil in the world, but teaching is not my forte. I should

not like it, and—in short, it is my choice to stay, and your mother thinks it will be best.”

Julia turned to her mother, with a reproachful look, but Mrs. Courtney gravely said:

“It is quite true, my love. Claire and I have talked it over, and I cannot insist on removing her when she has a protector here who is anxious to assert his claims upon her. M. Latour has written to me from Constantinople, stating that he is on his way home, and if his sister chooses to accept an asylum with him, he shall be only too happy to have her as his companion.”

Claire looked surprised. She quickly asked:

“Why did you not tell me this before, mamma? I was trusting to my fascinations alone to win Armand to offer me his protection.”

“I thought it right to inform M. Latour of your existence, and I wrote to him soon after we arrived in France. My letter, it seems, never reached his hands till he came back from the wild regions in which he has so long wandered. He ordered his letters to be kept for him by a firm in Constantinople, and he replied to me as soon as he received mine. It is nearly three years since it was written, and I had given up all hope of hearing from him; but his answer was sent to me this morning from the banking house of Latour & Co.”

“Will you permit me to read it?” asked Claire. “I should like to see something tangible from this will o’ the wisp brother of mine, for I have scarcely yet taught myself to regard him as anything more than a myth.”

“Of course you can read it. It was my purpose to show it to you, when I commenced the conversation Julia’s entrance interrupted.”

Mrs. Courtney took from her pocket an envelope, bearing a large seal with a crest upon it, and Claire eagerly drew from it a sheet of paper, on which was written the following lines:

“CONSTANTINOPLE, July 10th, 18—

“MRS. COURTNAY—*Madam*:—I cannot express to you the surprise with which I read the contents of your long delayed missive. Until then, I was profoundly ignorant of my father’s second marriage, and of the existence of my half sister.

“You tell me that M. Lapierre allied himself with a lady of good family, but no fortune; the first I was glad to know; the latter statement does not signify, as money is of little importance to me, and I am anxious to acquit myself of a debt to my father, which has already stood too long uncanceled.

“I have acquired a large fortune, and I have no family of my own to bestow it on; if my young sister is as spirituelle and attractive as you assure me she is, I shall be most happy to receive her, and place her in the position that is due to one so nearly related to me.

“The liberal intentions toward her, which you have expressed, have by this time been carried into effect, and I have no doubt that I shall find Claire accomplished and well-bred as I could desire. Express to her my fraternal sentiments, and say to her, that I should also have written to her, had time sufficed; but I have much on my hands, and I must defer any communication with her till we meet.

“There is something to explain, which cannot well be touched on, in a letter, and I hope that I shall find Claire prepared to listen candidly, to the statements I

have to make ; also to disabuse her mind of any of the unfavorable impressions she may have received of me.

“ My poor father was unjust to me ; he severed himself from me ; refused me the gratification of assisting him in his poverty, though I won the means of doing so, through my own perseverance. If Claire thinks hardly of me for this, tell her to reserve her judgment till she has heard my defence ; she bears the name of my mother, and for that alone I am prepared to welcome her to my heart.

“ I am aware that she has a claim on me for money, which caused heart-burning between my father and myself, but the retention of that money was an act of justice to myself. I have increased the sum, and held it sacredly as a fund, for my father to draw on, if his resentment towards me ever softened sufficiently to permit him to do so. It never did, and now it shall go to my sister as her dower, with such an addition to it as my own fortune will enable me to make. She will owe me no thanks for this, for it is simply an act of tardy justice on my part.

“ I shall not return to Paris for several weeks yet, but inclosed is a letter of credit for the use of Claire, and she can draw for any amount she pleases on Messrs. Latour & Co.

“ With the highest sentiments of respect and esteem, I am, Madam, your obliged and obedient servant.

“ ARMAND LATOUR.”

Claire read these agreeable lines with brightening eyes and flushing cheeks. When she had finished she exclaimed :

“ What a liberal man my brother is ; my father

must have misunderstood, and misjudged him, for the writer of this letter must be noble, and unselfish. Would you not say so, mamma?"

"I do not wish to sit up in judgment either on your father or your brother, Claire. The cause of their estrangement M. Latour will doubtless explain when you meet, and I hope it will prove perfectly satisfactory. In the meantime, you can make such use of his liberality as you choose, and anticipate the fair future he seems anxious to prepare for you. If you do not mar your own destiny, I think it may yet be a happy one."

Claire laughed gaily.

"Armand can give me all that I most eagerly desire; position, fortune, consideration. With these, I can extract some enjoyment from life, in spite of what has happened to infuse bitterness into my lot. I shall draw on his partner at once, and please myself by giving Julia the watch set with brilliants she is so anxious to have. What can I give *you*, mamma, for all the kindness you have lavished on me? I do not offer to repay you, for that would be impossible, but I should like to find something to suit your taste, to offer as a souvenir of the naughty child, with whom you have shown such patience."

Mrs. Courtney kissed her, and smilingly replied:

"It is like you, Claire, to think of giving in the first moment of your newly-acquired wealth. I will not deny you the gratification of bestowing the watch on Julia, for I can see how much she is enchanted with the prospect of getting it; but as to myself, your love is all I ask in return for what I have done for you."

Claire returned her caress, and said:

“You must always have that, at any rate, mamma; but it is like you, too, to refuse any tangible return for the benefits you confer. I shall find a way to prove to you that I only value the means placed at my disposal so far as I can use them for those I love.”

“Oh, Claire,” said Julia, “it is charming to know that your brother is so rich and so liberal; but I wish, all the same, that there was no such person. Then we should have you all to ourselves—and I had rather not have the watch and keep you.”

“I have no doubt of that, pet, but as you can’t have me, you must take my present, as the best substitute I can find. To tell you the truth, I think you will be a gainer by the exchange.”

“I shan’t believe that. You are my own darling Claire, and you are the prettiest creature I ever saw. I wonder what my brother will say when he sees how much you have improved? He has never seen you since he went to Heidelberg.”

“Oh, Andrew will scarcely give me a thought. He is in love with his cousin Emma, and he means to marry her and settle down in his native valley as soon as he returns home. I am only his sister, you know.”

Julia shook her small head doubtingly, and her mother threw a troubled glance toward Claire. She observed it, and drawing near to Mrs. Courtnay, spoke, in a subdued tone:

“Perhaps it will be best for me to go back to my seclusion till the time for your departure draws near. I can plainly see that you are uneasy at the prospect of a meeting between Andrew and myself.”

Her friend reflected a few moments, and then replied in the same tone:

“No, my dear ; I cannot banish you during the few weeks that remain to us in this country. After your promise to do nothing to attract my son, I think I can trust you together. Julia would be inconsolable if she were separated from you.”

“You *may* trust me, mamma. Andrew can never be more to me than the friend of my childhood ; and I should be base to attempt to rekindle in his heart the preference he has suppressed.”

So it was settled that Claire should remain till her brother came to claim her ; and, as soon as Mrs. Courtney saw her safe under his protection she intended to commence her preparations for departure.

Enchanted to be able to give in her turn, Claire drew on the bankers for a large sum, and bought an exquisite watch for Julia. She also purchased for Mrs. Courtney a rare and elegantly illustrated work in several volumes, which she remembered hearing her say she would like to buy if she could afford it. A limited number of copies had been printed, but, regardless of cost, Claire spent nearly the whole of her money to obtain it.

When this magnificent present was sent home, she purposely absented herself, for she feared that her benefactress would reproach her for the extravagance of which she had been guilty. She and Julia went out for a long walk, and returned only in time for supper.

The books were lying open upon the table, and Mrs. Courtney was examining them with evident pleasure. She looked up, as Claire came in, and said :

“You have afforded me an agreeable surprise, my dear, and I will not refuse your gift, though if I had

known that you designed spending for me so large a sum as these cost, I should have asked for something of less value."

"Oh, thank you, for accepting them so graciously, mamma. From me, nothing can be too costly to offer you."

"Provided you could afford it, Claire," replied Mrs. Courtney, with a smile. "I am afraid that you have impoverished yourself to give Julia and myself what we could very well have done without. How much have you left of the money you drew?"

"Fifty francs. But that is of no consequence—my letter of credit is unlimited."

"True; but you must not draw for money again very soon, after using so large a sum. Did you purchase anything for yourself?"

"Thanks to your kindness, I needed nothing," replied Claire, with a laugh. "Let us look over these exquisite illustrations together, and say nothing more of their cost."

"No, my child; we will say nothing more about that. I only wish to impress on you that you must not abuse the generosity of your brother. You have a taste for extravagance which has hitherto been repressed, and in the future you must be careful to put a reasonable limit to your expenditure."

"The only use I can see for money is to spend it," said Claire, perversely. "Armand is rich enough to let me have my swing, I suppose; if he complains, I will ask for an allowance, and keep within its limits."

"It may be as well to do so," was the reply, and the subject was dismissed. In truth, this young creature needed the admonition, for she had a magnificent taste,

a keen appreciation of the elegant and beautiful, and she was enchanted with the splendid vista that opened before her vivid imagination. Aladdin's wonderful lamp could scarcely have realized the dreams of splendor in which she revelled. If happiness was denied her, luxury, adoration and excitement should at least be hers, and the insignificant sum of which her benefactress seemed to think so much, Claire regarded as scarcely worth consideration.

She knew that she needed many things herself, but in the pleasure of giving she had set her own wants aside, intending to draw in a few more days, a sufficient sum to supply them. But Mrs. Courtnay rendered this unnecessary. Without Claire's knowledge, she went out the next day and ordered a complete outfit for a young lady just entering society, and her gift to her young protégée nearly balanced the cost of the books.

Claire protested against this when she became aware of it, and insisted that she would herself pay the bills, but this Mrs. Courtnay would not permit, and after a long conversation Claire submitted to the will of her friend, and allowed her to have her own way.

Andrew did not arrive quite so soon as was expected. The week was drawing to a close when he came alone, having parted with his tutor at Strasbourg.

Claire and Julia had gone out, and Mrs. Courtnay was glad to have him to herself for a little while. Andrew was now twenty-two years of age, but he looked at least five years older. He had grown tall and athletic, without losing the graceful liveness of figure suited to one of his years. His dark complexion had cleared, and on the bronzed cheeks the healthy glow of youth was seen. His wild-looking eyes had acquir-

ed a gentler expression, and his mother trusted that his whole nature was softened and subdued by the discipline of the few last years. He was more tender and considerate toward herself, and she indulged the brightest hope of his future career.

After giving some details of his journey, he impatiently asked :

“Where is Julia ? I shall be glad to see the little darling again, for it is a year since we parted.”

“She has gone out with Claire, but they will soon be back now.”

“Claire, here, too ? I was not aware that you had withdrawn her from her school.”

He spoke so coolly that Mrs. Courtney's heart was lightened of a heavy load of apprehension. She quietly said :

“She is staying with me a little while, until her brother claims her. M. Latour is on his way from the East, and he has written to me that he will gladly take charge of his sister and provide for her. Claire does not wish to return to Virginia, and I also think it best for her to accept the protection of her brother.”

Andrew listened to this statement with apparent indifference.

“It is the best thing she can do, I suppose, as it would not be pleasant for her to go back where her early history is known. I once believed that this strange brother of hers was not a suitable person to trust her with, but I have heard that he is not a bad fellow. M. Lapierre was scarcely justified in treating him as he did. But we have nothing to do with that.”

“I am glad to hear you speak so reasonably, my dear boy. I feared that you might still oppose me in this.

I think, for Claire's happiness, it will be best to leave her in France. Old memories would revive if she returned to the scenes of her early life, and I wish her to bury in oblivion all connected with her wretched past."

"Yes, it will be best," he vaguely replied. "That was a terrible mistake; but for that"—he paused abruptly, and then went on—"Does Claire still cling to the absurd notion that she is bound by the tie that has proved but a rope of sand to the villain who deserted her?"

His mother gravely replied:

"She does. We spoke of it but a few days ago, and she distinctly said that, to no other man on earth would she yield the duty of a wife."

"Does she pretend to love the ingrate still?"

"No; she spoke of him scornfully enough, but I am inclined to believe that a lingering feeling of affection prompts her to cling to the belief that a day will come in which she will be acknowledged before the world as his wife."

"Sentimental folly! wretched want of self-appreciation to suppose that *he* can elevate *her*," muttered Andrew, "but women will be fools."

"What are you saying, my son?"

"Oh, nothing that you would care to hear. But now that we are on this subject, let me say that the interest I take in Claire is only that of a brother. I shall go back to Virginia with my mind made up to take the wife that you have selected for me. Emma is a lovely and amiable girl, and she writes the most charming letters. I have regained my sober senses, and I know that she will suit me infinitely better than

Claire ever could, even if she were within my reach. For months I raged over my disappointment, but the fire died down to dead ashes at last—and you know how difficult it is to relume an extinguished flame.”

“My dear boy, you give me new life,” exclaimed Mrs. Courtney. “I have dreaded a meeting between you and Claire more than I care to tell you. I know there is no hope for you with her, and I am most happy to hear you say that your heart is turned to Emma. She will be a true helpmate to you; a tender and affectionate companion.”

“Yes, yes, I understand all that,” he impatiently said. “I intend to be reasonable and give you the daughter-in-law you covet, but don’t bore me with her praises. I know that Emma has all the domestic virtues, and I shall try and content myself with them, so let that suffice, mother.”

Mrs. Courtney was accustomed to his brusque manner, so she faintly laughed, and said:

“‘All is well that ends well,’ Andrew. When I clasp Emma to my heart as your wife, I shall be the happiest and proudest of mothers.”

“And I, of course, the most blessed of husbands, and most dutiful of sons,” he cynically replied. “Well, the affair is settled, for I have asked Emma to marry me, and she has consented.”

“That is the best news I have heard for a long time. We will have the wedding over as soon as possible after our return home.”

“Safe find, safe bind,” he laughingly said; “but here come the girls. I will hide behind this curtain, and take a peep at them before you let them know that I am here.”

Before his mother could reply, he sheltered himself in the recess of a window, and the next moment Claire came in, followed by Julia.

CHAPTER II.

THE ABDUCTION.

CLAIRE was in her walking-costume: a gray dress of soft, shining material, relieved at the throat by a scarf of brilliant colors. A coquettish little bonnet set on her magnificent suit of hair, of a tawny bronze, through which flickered gleams of gold. Her complexion was neither brown nor fair, but all its tints harmonized with that wonderful chevelure, and her dark eyes had a depth and lustre unknown to them in her earlier days.

Her rounded figure was supple and graceful as that of a young antelope, and it seemed impossible that she could ever be guilty of an awkward movement.

She glanced rapidly around the room, unclosed her ruby lips to speak, when Julia, who had closely followed her, exclaimed:

“Where is my brother? Madelon told us he had arrived, but I do not see him here. Oh, mamma, I see how glad you are looking, and I am sure you have hidden him away. Yes, there are his feet below that curtain. I see them plainly.”

She dashed at the curtain, drew it aside, and Andrew clasped her in his outstretched arms.

“What a keen little detective you are,” he laugh-

ingly said, as he issued from his retreat. "I meant to rush out on you, and take you by surprise. How you have grown, my pet, and Claire is positively dazzling. I declare I should never have known her again."

He came forward holding out his hand, which was taken with an air of frank cordiality, and Claire held up her cheek to be saluted as had been her childish habit after a separation.

Andrew approached his lips to its velvety surface, scarcely touching it, but even that contact made him shiver as if with sudden pain. She gaily said:

"I can return your compliment, Andrew, for you too have wonderfully improved. You have grown into quite a stately man, and you look like that fine picture of your father which hangs in your mother's room at the Grange."

"Thank you, for that is royally handsome; when I was a little fellow I used to wonder if the heathen gods were grander-looking than that dark man, with his proud face and regal bearing. Do you really think I so strongly resemble him, Claire?"

There was an inflexion of eagerness in his tone which Mrs. Courtnay did not like, and she hastened to say:

"'Handsome is as handsome does,' you know, Andrew. Do not show too much anxiety about your outward appearance, but let me tell what a good and dutiful son you are; how willing you have shown yourself to meet my views for you."

Andrew flushed slightly, and coldly said:

"As you please, mother; but do not give me too much credit for obedience to your wishes. What I have settled on, I thought best for my own happiness."

“Of course: no one will doubt that, I am sure. You must congratulate him, Claire, on the new prospects that are opening before him. We shall have a wedding soon after our return to Virginia, and the bride will be my favorite, Emma Carleton.”

“That is charming news indeed,” cried Claire, with beaming face.

But Julia did not seem so well pleased with the announcement. She was still clinging to her brother's breast, fondly caressing him, and she placed her mouth close to his ear, and whispered:

“Brother, I hoped you loved Claire, and would persuade her to go back with us. She won't go unless you do.”

His face flushed deeply, but he replied in the same tone:

“Nonsense, child; she can't marry me, you know, so she had better stay behind.”

“No, I don't know anything of the kind,” pouted Julia. “Cousin Emma isn't half as sweet and pretty as Claire.”

“What is that you are saying, Julia?” asked her mother, in a tone that was sharp for her to use. “You had better go and take off your things now. Supper will be served directly, and when that is over, we can have a long and pleasant evening together.”

“Come, pet, let us run off and make ourselves presentable in time for supper. I am ready for it, for we have had a long walk this afternoon.”

The two left the room together, and Andrew sat down looking moodily into vacancy. His mother asked:

“What has Julia said to bring that cloud upon your brow?”

“Oh, nothing that I did not know and feel before. She seems very fond of Claire, and most anxious to take her back home with us. It annoys me to see how impossible that is; on Julia’s account though, remember, mother, Claire can henceforth be nothing to me.”

“Of course, you fully understand that, Andrew. She *would* be nothing more than a sister to you, even if she could; and as you have plighted your troth to Emma, you surely cannot regret that.”

“No—I will not regret it. Claire is as beautiful as a dream, but as willful and tantalizing as a demon. She will lead many a poor wretch a dance that will end, God knows how. I may be dazzled and bewildered by her, but if we could be tied together, we should make life hateful to each other. You see that I have fully learned to understand her nature and my own, mother. For a few moments the old glamour came back, but I am sane again. The efforts of three years to tear her image from my heart have not been vain, I assure you, so don’t look so much alarmed.”

Mrs. Courtnay uneasily said:

“I feared such a result, and if I could have prevented a meeting between you, I would have done so. You are a man now, Andrew, and should possess the self-control of one. You are bound in honor to Emma, and you must resolutely close your heart to all fascinations save hers.”

“I understand all about that,” was the impatient reply. “My senses were only bewildered a few moments by that peerless creature. If it were anything more than that, I should scarcely have acknowledged the effect she produced upon me. I am safe, mother, for I am not going to be fool enough to open my

heart to a syren that would ever elude me as this one would. Here comes supper, and I am very glad of it, for I am confoundedly hungry.”

Madelon, a neat French maid, came in with the supper-tray, on which was found more substantial viands than were usually partaken of at that meal; for she remembered that the young gentleman had just arrived from a long journey, and she provided accordingly.

Claire and Julia made their appearance, and the four passed a very pleasant evening together. Mrs. Courtnay observed that the manner of her protégée to Andrew was friendly, but with a decided dash of coldness in it, which plainly said, that beyond fraternal friendship he was not to pass with her. She laid aside the many fascinating little ways which ordinarily made her so enchanting to those with whom she was thrown, and assumed a dignity of bearing which was something entirely new to her.

Andrew tacitly accepted this new *role*, and treated her with quiet respect, never suffering any indication of his real feelings to appear on the surface. He had flattered himself that he had put her from his heart, and to make a relapse impossible, he had placed a barrier between them which he believed he would consider impassable. But to his dismay he found, even on this first evening of renewed intercourse, that the slightest glance of encouragement from Claire would bring him to her feet again, reckless of all other ties and obligations.

It was a humiliating discovery, and his pride rose up in arms to defend his honor, and keep him true to the faith he had pledged to one he knew to be tenderly attached to him.

As the days passed on, the struggle became more difficult, for the very reserve Claire manifested towards him served only to add new fuel to the fire that sprang with devouring force from the dead ashes into which he believed it had been consumed.

Yet Andrew was so completely on his guard that neither his mother nor the object of his wild passion suspected what was passing in his tortured heart. He was soon ready to cast his obligations to the winds, to dare all to make this adorable creature his own.

He would force her to his arms ; compel a return to his love ; nor would he despair of success in what was so vital to himself. Claire no longer loved Thorne ; and the fantastic idea of yet receiving justice from him must be set aside at all risks. She should be his own ; that unworthy ingrate should never reclaim her, never.

Such were the thoughts that seethed perpetually within him ; yet Andrew did such violence to his own nature that he effectually concealed every indication of them, even from the watchful eyes of his mother, and she congratulated herself on the perfect indifference both parties seemed to manifest toward each other.

Claire was very agreeably occupied in superintending the making up of the new and elegant wardrobe in which she was to make her *début* in the society she panted to enter, and she paid no more attention to Andrew than was necessary to keep him in a good humor. She did not suspect the state of his feelings.

The time for M. Latour's return to Paris was drawing near, and the preparations for the departure of the Courtnay family had commenced. Toward the end of July, the party was seated at the luncheon table discussing their plans, when Andrew turned to Claire and said :

“You have never been with me to Versailles, as you promised when I first came. I wish to visit the palace and stand on the balcony on which the heroic Marie Antoinette appeared before that infuriated mob of demons, holding her child in her arms. Will you come this afternoon, Claire? I wish you to be my companion when I visit that spot.”

“I scarcely know how I can go for mamma and Julia have an engagement, and they expect me to go with them.”

“I dare say they will excuse you,” he lightly replied, “and as it is the first time I have asked you to go out with me, I think you might consent without hesitation. I hope you are not afraid to trust yourself in my care?”

“Afraid! no indeed—why should I be? I have been to Versailles several times, but I shall be glad to make another pilgrimage to the spot around which so many historical associations cluster, if your mother will excuse me from going with her.”

“It is settled, then, for I am sure she will offer no objections. What do you say, *madame mère*? Will not Julia suffice to you this afternoon, while, for once, and perhaps for the last time, I monopolize Claire?”

“If it is all the same to you, Andrew, I had rather you would defer your visit to another day. I wish particularly to take Claire with me this afternoon.”

She saw the storm that was gathering on his dark brow, and deprecatingly added:

“It can make little difference to you, I suppose. If it does, however, I will let both her and Julia accompany you, as it is not customary here for young ladies to drive out alone with gentlemen.”

“That is nonsense, mother, for brothers escort their sisters in all countries, and Claire is such to me. I will be frank with you. I do not wish Julia to go, because I desire to have a long talk with Claire before her brother comes, and this will be the most agreeable opportunity.”

Mrs. Courtnay still demurred a little, but Andrew carried his point; and so completely had he blinded both ladies, that neither of them suspected the real object he had in view. It was decided that Claire should accompany him to Versailles, and soon after his mother set out on her visit with Julia, Andrew drove to the door in a handsome open carriage, with a small boy in livery behind. Claire was quite ready, and she took her place by his side with smiling grace, happy in the anticipation of an agreeable drive with a pleasant companion.

The desperate venture which had been gradually maturing in young Courtnay's mind through the last few weeks had been carefully prepared for, and he believed that once safely out of the city with his fair companion, he could not fail to bring it to a successful termination in spite of such opposition as Claire might offer.

When she came to understand the depth and intensity of his passion for her, she would—she must forgive him. The love that mastered his whole being must not only win pardon for this outrage, but it must appeal to her tender woman's heart to return it.

Such was Andrew's insane reasoning. For the present he had but one object in view: to gain the absolute mastery of Claire's fate, and force her to remain beside him, at any cost to himself or to her.

Courtney was like a man in delirium; he had lost his mental balance, and he plunged forward in the path he had elected to take, regardless of consequences.

The conversation of the pair was gay and careless enough till they had passed the barriers of the city and driven several miles into the country. The horse Andrew drove was a magnificent English bay, that could easily make his twelve miles in the hour, and the exhilarating motion brought a bright color to the sparkling face of Claire and new animation to her spirits. She scarcely noticed whither they were going, till Courtney suddenly turned into a cross-road leading to a thick wood-land.

As the carriage swept rapidly onward, Claire, in some perturbation, asked:

"Have you not mistaken the road, Andrew? I thought you were too well posted to leave the public thoroughfare?"

And with a sudden feeling of apprehension Claire glanced at the dark face that was looking down upon her. She saw that it was radiant with exultation, passion, and power, and she trembled in spite of her efforts to be calm.

In fervent tones, he replied:

"It means that I adore you—that I cannot live without you, and I will dare every thing to make you mine. You are slower of comprehension than I thought, Claire, if you cannot divine my intentions. All is prepared for our union, and the tie that will bind you to the man who lives only for you will surely be considered as more sacred than the one you persist in regarding as anything more than the nullity it is."

With defiant haughtiness, she asked:

“Do you imagine for a moment that I will submit to be forcibly united to any man, or consent to live with him on any terms after the perpetration of such an outrage? No; you mistake me much, if you suppose such a thing possible. I command you to turn the horse’s head in the direction of Paris, and take me back to your mother.

“The affection I feel for you will be turned to loathing if I am forcibly bound to you, nor shall any earthly power induce me to remain with you. I would sever myself from you as widely as earth and sea can sunder us—refuse to hold any communication with you throughout all my future life.”

“You think so now, Claire, but I will change all that. You shall not be able to resist my efforts to win you over, and as to leaving me you shall not have the opportunity to escape. At first, it may be a bondage of hate, but time and effort will turn it into submission, and affection for the master of your destiny.”

His tone was so determined, his manner so resolute, that courageous as Claire was, she began to grow alarmed. She asked herself if it could be possible that Andrew would perpetrate so great an outrage against her as to tear her forcibly from her friends, and immure her in some lonely spot till she purchased release by bending to his will? She faintly inquired:

“How will you accomplish that? You cannot secrete me from the knowledge of those who are interested in me. You will not absent yourself from your mother, and sister?”

“Can I not? Ha! ha! I will do *anything* for the sake of securing you. I have made my arrangements. Relays of horses are provided, and as soon as we are

married, I shall set out with you for Switzerland. Hidden there in some secluded mountain hamlet, I will remain, till, like Petruchio, I have tamed my fair one, and brought her to know that I am her true lord and master. Our honeymoon may not be as sweet as that you once enjoyed with a traitor, but it will be followed by the sober certainty 'of waking bliss,' which is better than your first experience of wedded happiness."

Claire shivered; she felt the conviction that the man beside her was suffering from temporary madness, and how to escape from him was her only thought. She leaned back on the seat, and tried to recover complete control of herself; for through her own coolness and self-possession, she knew her only road to safety lay. She had exhausted all the arguments at her command without any result, so she remained passive, and no more was said till a sudden turn in the road brought in view a small ivy-covered cottage standing amid a clump of forest trees.

It appeared to be a lodge belonging to a chateau which loomed in the distance, gray, gloomy, and half ruinous. The place seemed an utter solitude; nothing was heard save the murmur of the evening breeze through the trees, or the cry of some bird among them; no living form was seen upon the landscape, but the door of the cottage was open, and a thin spire of smoke curled up from its chimney.

Andrew dashed up to the door, threw the reins to the lad, who had not been able to understand a word of the conversation carried on so near him, and offered his hands to Claire to assist her to alight. As it would have been useless to refuse to do so, she descended from the vehicle, and submitted to be led toward the house.

A woman in sabots, and a high cap stiffly starched, arose from a wheel at which she was spinning flax, and made a low courtesy. She made signs toward an inner chamber, and Claire soon discovered that she was a deaf mute. Courtnay seemed to understand the motions of her fingers, for he nodded, and said :

“It is all right ; come, Claire, this is our humble temple in which to celebrate our nuptials, but we can have high mass, and all the imposing ceremonial of the church at a more fitting opportunity. I hope by this time that you have seen the folly of opposing me, and will act with proper decorum before the clergyman. Let us go in ; we shall find him awaiting us.”

“He is very accommodating, but you must excuse me from going to seek him. I have no use for his services, and I am sure I never wish to look upon the face of so unprincipled a wretch as that man must be who dares to profane his sacred calling in such a way as this. It will be useless to attempt to carry on this farce, Andrew, for I shall refuse to make the responses, and the marriage will be of no account unless I do.”

“We shall see about that,” he replied, through his half-closed teeth. “If you refuse to go to him, he can come to you. It does not signify where the words are spoken that will give me the right to control you.”

With a defiant toss of her haughty head, Claire sat down upon a wooden bench near the door, and began to make signs to the woman herself : but she shook her head, and averted her eyes. With a laugh, Andrew said :

“It’s of no use, *she* won’t aid you in any way, for my gold has already bought her up. You need not

attempt to run away, for a man is on guard near the door by this time, and you would at once be caught, and brought back."

Andrew turned from her, rapped on the door of communication, and called out in a loud tone :

"Come forth, reverend sir, and perform your duty quickly. We have no time to lose."

There was a slight bustle, the door opened, and a small, wiry-looking man, with bleared eyes, and a red nose, appeared. He wore the scholar's gown as typical of his calling, but nothing else about him indicated the profession to which he belonged. He was evidently a wolf in sheep's clothing, and but for Andrew's determination to make her lawfully his own, Claire would have believed that he had picked up some drunken brawler to play the part of priest in the approaching ceremony. That this one was a disgrace to the order to which he belonged she had no difficulty in seeing, but "once a priest, always a priest," and the right to exercise his calling could not be taken from him.

He carried a prayer book in his hand, which was opened at the marriage service, and he came forward with a shambling gait, saying in a rather tremulous voice ;

"I am quite ready, Mr. Courtnay. Good evening, Miss ; I hope that you have got over your scruples about that first marriage, and are as ready to take my young friend here, as he is anxious to secure you. Now that I see you, I don't wonder at his infatuation ; I've seen many beauties in my day, but you outshine them all."

The vulgar familiarity of this address heightened the disgust of Claire, and with haughty scorn she replied :

“I have been brought hither against my will, and if you attempt to carry out the infamous purpose you have been bribed to accomplish, it will be at your own deadly peril. You must be aware that such a proceeding as this is illegal, and that the fetters you would place upon me are as easily broken as a rope of sand. If you really are a clergyman, you must know that the ceremony of marriage performed by you between that madman and myself cannot stand. I protest against it, and I shall refuse to utter the responses.”

He insolently replied:

“It is useless to work yourself into a passion, Mademoiselle. It cannot serve you. You do not know my name; you will never see me again, so I shall run no risk. I came hither to unite you to my young friend here, and I shall do it, in spite of any opposition you may offer. I shall really be doing you good service to give you to a protector who is rich and madly in love with you.”

“Andrew, will you really go on with this infamy?” asked Claire, despairingly. “Stop, I implore you, before it is too late.”

Courtney made no other reply than to go to the door to ascertain if the husband of the peasant woman was at the post assigned him. He beckoned to him to approach, and after exchanging a few words with him, turned to Claire and quietly said:

“All is ready. Come, Claire, you cannot escape me now, and you will find it best to accept your destiny as gracefully as possible.”

He would have taken her hand, but she haughtily repulsed him, and looking steadily at him, said:

"Andrew, if you persist in this wickedness, I shall *kill* you. Do you hear me? I will take your life sooner than become the slave of your will."

"It is I who will become *your* slave, my angel. Death at your hands will be sweeter than life without you. Come, my love; time is passing, and we must be far from here before nightfall."

He threw his arm around her and forcibly lifted her to her feet. She struggled to escape from him, and shrieked aloud in the hope that some one might chance to hear her who was not in league with her mad lover.

Courtney held her to his side inexorably, and exhausted by her efforts to free herself, Claire began to grow faint and sick.

"Now is the time," said the clergyman. "She cannot offer any further resistance, and Nannette can bend down her head at the proper time. I'll give her a sign, and she knows what she has to do."

"Cut the ceremony as short as possible; there is no need of all the rigmarole that is in the book," said Andrew, irreverently. "Have it over before she gains breath to scream again. I shall know how to reconcile her when it is all over."

The man nodded, and without further preamble struck into the heart of the service,—“I, Andrew, take thee, Claire, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward.” He paused there, and Courtney replied in a sonorous voice—“I will.”

He then attempted to address the same form to the unwilling bride, but she struck the book from his hand, and by a violent wrench tore herself from the grasp that held her and fled toward the door. It was darkened at the same moment by the form of a gentleman into whose arms she almost rushed.

The intruder was a middle-aged, gray-haired man, for whom Antoine, the peasant on guard, had made way with evident signs of affright and amazement upon his features. He was a slender, dark-eyed man, with a thoughtful, expressive face, and the air and dress of a gentleman. He regarded the scene before him with evident astonishment, and in a voice that sounded strangely familiar to Claire, said :

“ I have intruded on a wedding party, I believe, but from all the indications it would seem a lucky thing for the bride that I have made my appearance. Antoine, what does this mean, and how has such an affair been arranged to take place in your cottage without the knowledge of any one at the chateau ? ”

The trembling peasant abjectly replied :

“ Oh, my lord, I—I did not know that you had returned, or I should never have presumed to do such a thing. But the young gentleman offered me so much money to let the little affair come off here, that—that I could not refuse the chance to gain it.”

Courtney, alternately pale and red, was so taken by surprise by this unexpected interruption, that for a few moments he was incapable of speaking. He recovered himself sufficiently to approach Claire, who still clung speechless to the arm of the unknown, and attempted to remove her. With assumed calmness he said :

“ This lady is my wife, sir, or nearly so, for the ceremony was almost concluded when you made your inopportune appearance. You will oblige me by retiring, and it can be finished.”

“ Excuse me, sir, but I prefer hearing what this young lady has to say, before I leave her to your mercy again. She was evidently resisting your attempt

to force her to marry you ; I am the lord of the manor, and I am bound to protect her if she needs my assistance."

By this time Claire had recovered sufficiently to speak. Assured of his power to protect her, she composedly said :

"I appeal to you, sir, to save me from a man who is suffering from temporary insanity. Nothing else can excuse the violence of which he has been guilty. I have been reared with him ; his mother has been one to me, but I have never given him cause to believe that I could be induced to marry him. In fact, there are insuperable obstacles to our union ; but seized with sudden madness, he has made this attempt to trample them in the dust. Protect me from him, but deal gently with him, for when he returns to his sober senses, he will be able to appreciate the enormity of the wrong he was about to do me."

"It was no wrong—I am not mad," cried Andrew, with blazing eyes and white lips. "I will make you mine, or die in the attempt. Come back to me ; I have the best right to you, and this stranger shall not come between us. If he persist in doing so, his life shall be the forfeit."

He drew from his pocket a small revolver and pointed it at the stranger, but Claire threw herself before him and cried :

"Fire at me, for I would sooner be killed than accept the fate you would compel me to embrace."

At these words the fury died out of his eyes : he lowered the pistol, and a mortal paleness overspread his face, as he said in a broken tone :

"Is it so, Claire ? Do you recoil from me to that extent ?"

“I do, Andrew Courtnay. You have destroyed every feeling I have for you save contempt. Your mind must be warped from the right, or you would never have attempted such an outrage as this. Go back to Paris; I shall not return with you. I will sooner trust this gentleman to take me safely back than find myself again in your power.”

The stranger drew her arm through his own, and his expressive face lighted up as he said :

“I believe I can claim the *right* to protect you, mademoiselle. You are Claire Lapierre, and this young gentleman is the son of Mrs. Courtnay, of Virginia?”

“Quite so, monsieur,” cried Claire—“and you?—who are you?”

“I am your brother, Armand Latour, and I am most happy that my sudden return to my long deserted home has enabled me to rescue you from the unpleasant position in which I find you. From this hour, I will take you under my care, as it will scarcely be safe to permit you to return to Mrs. Courtnay’s roof while her son remains beneath it.”

Claire turned toward him, their eyes met, and she impulsively threw herself upon his breast, exclaiming :

“Oh, my brother! found at last when I most needed you! How shall I ever prove to you the gratitude I feel for the inestimable service you have rendered me?”

Andrew looked on like one in a dream; but he roused himself and drearily said :

“So, this is the end of all my well-laid plans. Fate is against me, and I give up. Adieu, Claire; I will return to my mother, and tell her all; then I will tear you from my heart, ungrateful girl! You shall no

longer have the power to torture me as you have lately done. Away from you I shall regain my senses, and go upon my way, happier, perhaps, than if I had forced you to my arms. If this man is really your brother, remain with him; it will be best, for after this parting I never wish to look upon your tantalizing face again. It has worked me woe enough."

Touched by the anguish expressed in his pallid face, Claire held out her hand to him, and gently said:

"Forgive me, Andrew, if I have caused you unhappiness, as I forgive you for attempting to coerce me into a union which you must have known would be most repulsive to me. In M. Latour I see my father as I first remember him; I hear his voice speaking to me from his lips, and I willingly consent to remain with him. To-morrow I will seek your mother, but you and I need not meet again."

Courtney took the offered hand, pressed it to his lips and heart, and then placing it in that of her brother's, hoarsely said:

"Guard her and make her happy, as I meant to do. I believed that, in time, I would win her to love me, or I should never have attempted to carry out the plan you have frustrated."

He rushed out of the cottage, and in a few more moments was driving furiously toward Paris.

At the appearance of M. Latour on the scene, the red-nosed clergyman had disappeared through the door of the inner room, from which he effected his escape through a window.

Antoine and his wife were humbly standing against the wall, dreading the sentence that might be pronounced upon them by their angry seigneur. M.

Latour sternly regarded them, and then said to the man :

“How dared you lend your aid to such a piece of villainy as this? You and Nannette may prepare to leave Latour at once, for I shall not retain you in my service any longer.”

“Oh, my lord, I—I did not mean any harm to the young lady. I thought it was only a runaway match, till she went on so with the young man. Only forgive me this offence, Monsieur, and I will never be guilty of another. I have served you faithfully—indeed I have.”

The dumb woman gesticulated violently to him, but he stoutly shook his head, and she turned despairingly away, uttering a strange, sobbing sound, that moved Claire to pity. She turned to her brother and appealingly said :

“Since I am safe, and this adventure has brought us nearer together than months of formal intercourse might have done, I entreat that these poor people shall be pardoned. This will be a lesson to them to be more careful in the future to what temptations they give ear. You will not refuse the first request I make of you, my brother.”

The shadow left his face, and with a smile, he said :

“I scarcely think any man could refuse a request from you, Claire. Do you know that I find you infinitely more charming than Mrs. Courtney’s letter led me to expect? You are very beautiful, my sister, and you have proved that you possess the spirit of a heroine. Since you ask it I forgive these people—but I warn you, Antoine, that you must be very careful not to offend me in the future. Thank my sister for her

successful intercession, and recognize in her your future chatelaine."

Antoine impulsively threw himself upon his knees before Claire, and bowing almost to the earth, humbly said:

"You are an angel of goodness, mademoiselle, and I promise to be faithful to you till death."

His wife also knelt, making gestures of entreaty, and M. Latour curtly said:

"Enough of this, good people. Explain to your wife, Antoine, that this treachery is forgiven, and you will not be sent adrift. Come, Claire, let us go on to the chateau. I little thought, when I left it this afternoon for a walk, that I should return accompanied by the fair being who is to make it a home for me in the future."

He drew her arm beneath his own, and they issued from the cottage, and struck into a path overgrown with weeds, which led toward the gloomy-looking building that frowned in the distance.

CHAPTER III.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

THE path pursued by M. Latour and his young companion soon merged in a broad carriage road, shaded by magnificent elms, which ascended towards the house.

Everything bore an air of neglect and decay. The trees were unpruned; the shrubery left to run wild

over the earth, and the statuary which ornamented the grounds was disfigured with patches of green moss—the accumulation of years. A marble fountain of beautiful design, which stood in a wide, grassy space, was almost choked up with the dead leaves that had accumulated in its basin; and the water-nymph, that had once presided over it, lay prone upon the earth.

The chateau consisted of a large central tower, which had evidently been a feudal stronghold, for its walls were many feet thick, and narrow loopholes served as windows—while a strong portal, heavily plated with iron, seemed yet to bid defiance to attack.

Wings of more modern date had been added to it, though evidently at different periods. The western one was in a state of partial dilapidation, and seemed to be given up to the possession of rats and spiders. But the east wing, built in the florid, gothic style, was in thorough repair, and the terraced walk around it was in perfect order. Two immense dogs, carved in granite, guarded the entrance; and Claire was quite surprised at the extent and elegant appearance of this modern portion of the building.

As they walked forward, she said:

“It was a most fortunate chance that brought you to my assistance, Armand. That poor boy is not quite sane, I am convinced, and I feel the deepest pity for him. I hope you will not think that I have played the coquette with him, or attempted in any way to trifle with his affections. My gratitude to his mother, for all her goodness to me, would have rendered that impossible.”

The brother looked at her, while she was speaking, and smilingly replied:

“I can easily believe that no man, not a stoic, could live in the same house with you, Claire, and not lose his head about you. I am not surprised at young Courtney’s folly, though it took rather an unusual and dangerous course for you. I think you were explicit enough to cure him, though; and, after what you said to him in my presence, I can scarcely accuse you of misleading him. My arrival was opportune, indeed, and it was a mere chance that led me to stop here, at all. I have not seen the place for the last four years, but a small establishment has been kept up, and I knew that, come when I would, I should find my bailiff and his wife ready to receive me. I intended to go at once to Paris, but a sudden whim seized me to stop here a few days and see how the old place looked. I walked out this afternoon to call at the lodge and let Antoine know that I had returned, for I did not enter through his gate—one in the lower plantation gave me access to the grounds: that is how I happened to arrive at the moment you most needed my protection. It is well for Mr. Courtney that the kindness of his family to you will shield him: had he been any other person, I would have had him punished for his attempted abduction—and the law in this country is very severe on such offenders.”

“Andrew’s own regrets will be punishment enough. He is a reckless and headlong man, but he has many noble and excellent traits, and he will bitterly regret what he has done. He is the idol of his mother, and now that I am separated from him, he will do all that is possible to please her in the future. I am very grateful to you for consenting so readily to receive me, and allow me to claim a home in your house.

“Under any circumstances I could never have gone back to mamma after the event of this afternoon. I read your letter to her, and she thought it very kind.”

A shadow swept over the expressive face of Latour, and he briefly said :

“Don’t thank me, Claire, for doing that which was plainly my duty. I owe you a debt which my father would never permit me to pay to him. I shall do my best to discharge it, for it has hung for years as an incubus upon me. I rejoiced when I learned that he had left behind him a claimant upon the fund on which he would never draw himself. It was set aside religiously for his use, but he would never accept any portion of it, and so bitter was he against me, that he withheld from me all knowledge of where he was to be found. But do not think that I neglected to inquire. I have written again and again to Philadelphia, the place to which he first went, but always without any result. It is eighteen years last May since we parted, and Mrs. Courtnay’s letter came to me in July, informing me of his second marriage, your birth and his decease. My sister, did he speak kindly of me before he left this earth forever? Did he bid you seek my protection, and was it for that purpose you came to France?”

Claire evaded the first question, but answered the last.

“I came hither to seek you, hoping that I might win a place in your regard, Armand. I must remain in France, for there are reasons why I cannot return to Virginia with Mrs. Courtnay, which shall hereafter be explained.”

“So much the better for me. I have passed through a lonely life. All my thoughts, all my desires

centered in one absorbing pursuit ; but that must soon yield me the reward I have so faithfully struggled to win, and I am most happy that I shall have some one to share my triumph—to enjoy the fabulous wealth it must yield to my grasp.”

His face grew luminous, his eyes lighted up, and Claire was more struck than before with his resemblance to their father. She softly said :

“If you had nothing to give me, Armand, I should love you for the likeness you bear to him that is gone. But I am very glad to know that you are rich, for I love magnificence, and my imagination revels in splendid dreams which I never hoped to possess the power to realize.”

“You shall have it now, Claire. I promise it to you with certainty. To make you happy is the only atonement I can render for the past. But here we are at the house, and when supper is over, I will relate to you the cause of the estrangement between my father and myself. When you have heard all, I scarcely think you will consider me to blame for it.”

Through the open portal they entered a vestibule paved with a mosaic of colored marbles, and hung around with family portraits, some of them very ancient, and painted in the crudest style of art. Claire merely glanced at them, for they represented the ancestors of the Latours, and she had no interest in them.

Massive looking doors, elaborately carved, opened from this hall into the family apartments. M. Latour led the way into a suit of rooms fitted up in a style of luxury that surprised and delighted the young girl. The first they entered had a circular divan in the centre of the polished floor, around which Persian rugs

were placed, and the walls were decorated with pipes of various kinds, and stands of small arms richly inlaid.

"This is my smoking-room," said Latour carelessly; "but I scarcely know why I fitted it up, for I am not very fond of the weed."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for I do not like the scent of tobacco," said Claire, frankly. "This pretty room would make a charming boudoir."

"So it would, and the one that adjoins it will suit you for a bed-room. I will have my pipes and arms taken away, and substitute musical instruments, pictures, books and flowers for them."

"Thank you," said Claire, blushing slightly at this unexpected offer, "but if I take possession of your rooms, what are you to do?"

With a laugh he replied:

"Oh, as to that, I have a den in the old tower that suits me far better than any other place. In fact, I usually occupy it, when I am here, as it is the scene of my labors."

"What sort of labor do you perform up in that gloomy looking place?"

"That is my secret, but it shall be none to you, if I find you really care to know it. Let us pass into the saloon, in which supper will soon be served. Over it we must get better acquainted, and afterwards we will exchange confidences."

She passed into the next apartment, the floor of which was waxed till it shone like a mirror; on the walls hung several paintings of the modern school of art, representing game, fruit, and flowers. In the centre of the floor was a small Turkey carpet, on which the table was placed, and chairs of the Louis Quatorze

style were ranged against the walls. The large windows of this room looked out on a wild portion of the park, the broken appearance of which contrasted with the smiling grain fields that stretched away in the distance.

An old woman in a quaint high cap, short petticoats, and bright colored stockings, was arranging a service of costly Sevres china, upon a waiter of silver filagree. She raised her head, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment at the appearance of a young girl with her master.

“Eh! the saints be good to us. I never expected to see such a sight as this with my old eyes. Is it really you, M. Armand, a-coming in with a pretty young lady holding your hand? Did *she* come from the East, too, and have you kept her hid away till now?”

“By no means, Zolande—on the contrary, I have just found her. You remember your old master, I suppose? Look at this young girl, and see if you can recognize her as his daughter? This is my sister, and her name is Claire Lapierre.”

The woman stared blankly at the smiling face before her, and shaking her head doubtfully, replied:

“I remember your father very well, but Mademoiselle is not like him. She is more beautiful than any Lapierre that I have ever seen. She is as lovely as the picture of the Madonna that hangs in the chapel, but she hasn't the peaceful look which that wears. She'll have little peace herself, and deprive many others of it, too, before her destiny is accomplished.”

“Such a prophecy as that hardly entitles you to the reputation of a sibyl,” said Latour, laughing, “for

every pretty woman is bound to make as many men as possible miserable, and Claire would not be true to her mission if she did not. Get another cup and plate from the Sevres set, and bring on the supper as soon as possible, for I have eaten little to-day.

"No?—coming back to the old place took your appetite away, and you scarcely touched my famous ragout. But I have a nice supper for you of chocolate, bread and butter, and fruit. I hope Mademoiselle will enjoy it."

"As it will be the first one partaken of under my brother's roof, I am sure I shall," said Claire.

Zolande peered curiously at her, and asked:

"Are you quite sure you are M. Armand's sister, now? And if you are, how did you get here? I have heard no carriage drive up to the door."

"I came across the ocean to find my brother, and accident brought us face to face this afternoon. I am all the way from America," said Claire, laughing at the old woman's puzzled look.

"From 'Merica! I thought all the people there were black; but you are white enough. You don't say that you came from that outlandish country, now?"

"Yes, I am from that wild country, but as a general thing the people of it are fairer than the French. My father was thought a dark man over there, and my mother, who was an American, had blonde hair and fair complexion."

"Well, it is astonishing what lies travelers do tell. I always heard that the people there were negroes, with only a white man here and there. And you are truly my old master's daughter, and no trickery about it, eh?"

Latour frowned, but Claire lightly replied :

“Time will show ; but such as I am, you must accept me as your chatelaine, for I shall take up my abode with my brother.”

“Well, if M. Armand is your brother, it is all right ; but you’re not like any of the Lapierras I have seen before. You’re like your mother, I suppose, and she must have been a mighty pretty creature too.”

M. Latour here sternly spoke :

“Zolande, the doubts you express are impertinent, and must not be repeated elsewhere. This young lady is Claire Lapierre, and your future mistress. Remember that, and do not permit your garrulity to betray you into disrespect to her or to me.”

“Hoity, toity, we’ve got very grand while we have been at the East, and the old nurse that took you from your mother’s arms can’t be allowed to have her say. You are my foster child, M. Armand, and I scarcely expected you to take me to task for the freedom of my tongue. I’m done now, and I am very glad that mademoiselle has come to brighten up the dullness of the old house, for we have been a long time without anything young or pretty in it.”

M. Latour sighed softly and more gently said :

“I did not mean to vex you, Zolande ; and I assure you I remember with gratitude all your goodness to the motherless child you took to your bosom. Accept my sister as such, without further question ; make her welcome to Latour, and I shall soon forget the doubts that seemed to cast an imputation on her and on myself.”

The old woman, easily appeased, nodded, laughed and said :

“You are too good to be doubted, M. Armand.”

She left the room, but returned in a few moments bearing a waiter on which the supper was placed. She transferred the dishes to the table, set a plate for Claire, invited them to be seated, and then, at a sign from M. Latour, left them alone. The pictures on the young girl's cup were of such exquisite beauty that she thought it a shame to defile it with food. She naïvely said :

“These are too beautiful to be put to any common use. I thought such things could only be afforded by princes. You must be very rich, brother.”

He shrugged his shoulders :

“Passably so, *ma chère* ; but my present possessions are but a tithe of those I hope to gain by the cunning of my brain and the skill of my combinations. As you say, these frail bits of china are worth their weight in gold, but when my Eldorado is won, I will give you cups of gold crusted with diamonds and emeralds. Your jewels shall rival the evening star in brilliancy, for all I have, or may win, shall be yours to do as you please with.”

“What a grand seigneur you are, Armand ! but while you lavish your fortune on me so profusely, is there no other with whom you would prefer sharing it ? Have you passed through life thus far without finding one to love ? ”

He looked at her a moment with an expression of intense pain, and then curtly said :

“But for you I am alone in the world, and I do not regret that it is so. Treachery toward him who adores them, is the creed of women, and I have long since abjured the love of the sex. Cease admiring your

cup, and drink your chocolate before it becomes cold. I can recommend the fruit, for it was grown on the place."

After sipping a few drops, Claire smiled faintly, and said:

"It is curious that your opinion of women should exactly coincide with that of mine for your sex. To know a heart to be devoted, is a temptation to man to trample it in the dust. Is it not so, Armand?"

Latour regarded her with surprise:

"You are too young and far too attractive, to speak from experience in such a matter. I am very sure that your heart would be deemed too precious to be cast away by the fortunate winner."

"So much for your judgment," she replied, with slightly scornful emphasis. "What will you say when I tell you that I have gone through that crushing process? that in passing through it, all the softer and gentler impulses of my nature have been estranged?—that I am now but a glittering butterfly, ready to flutter through the world, accepting such homage as my beauty may win, but never trusting again—never believing in the truth of such professions of love as may be made to me?"

She spoke the last words so rapidly, and with so much excitement that her brother was constrained to believe them. He gravely and compassionately said:

"Mrs. Courtnay hinted at no such experience in her letter to me, and it seems strange that in a new country, where the habits of the people must be more primitive than here, that a girl of your age should have been exposed to such treatment. I think you were but sixteen when you came to France."

"No, I was not so old as that ; but the spoiler had found me nevertheless. There is so much more freedom allowed to girls in the country of my birth, than here, that the story I have to tell is not so very uncommon there, however painful it may be. Do you wish to hear my sad experience, Armand ?"

"If you will relate it to me," he gravely replied. "Everything concerning yourself has a vivid interest for me."

After a brief pause, Claire commenced :

"Before my father died, a young artist was accidentally thrown upon his kindness, for care and shelter, during illness. He flattered me ; he seemed to love me ; and he wooed me with apparent openness. Papa's consent to our union was won, for he believed that he should not live long, and he thought that Walter Thorne would give me a home and happiness when he was gone.

"My father died suddenly, and I went to Mrs. Courtnay. My lover was there, too. Mamma insisted that I should remain with her two years, to prepare myself for the brilliant destiny I foolishly believed opening before me. But I listened to the false man, whose beguiling tongue had won me, and consented to a private marriage."

Latour uttered an expression of incredulous amazement.

"Married !—and without the knowledge of your guardian ?"

"Certainly. Mamma knew nothing of it till I was far away. My husband took me to Richmond, where, for a few weeks, I was as happy as the angels in heaven. Then we went to his home. Armand, I was

ignominiously expelled from the house, by the father-in-law I had been taught to believe would gladly welcome me. He told me that my marriage should be annulled, and threatened to disinherit his son if he did not consent to a legal separation. Let it suffice; the craven submitted to his terms, and I am a repudiated wife. In France, no freedom is accorded to young girls, but with widows it is different; and I wish you to present me to society as your widowed sister. That is why I have inflicted on you this long explanation."

CHAPTER IV.

CLAIRE'S PROGRAMME.

CLAIRE had spoken with a cold assumption of indifference that almost appalled her brother. It might have been thought that she was relating the history of a stranger, instead of the fiery ordeal through which she had passed but a few years before. M. Latour found it difficult to believe that it was indeed her own experience. He asked:

"Is this really true, Claire? or have you only made up a romance that you may enjoy a laugh at my expense if I am credulous enough to believe it?"

"It is true as the holy gospels, every word of it."

"Then how can you speak so calmly of it? Such treachery was enough to break your heart."

"If mine had broken I should have died, you know; but I was too strong for that, and it only killed the tender organism from which the deeper emotions are

supposed to emanate. I shall never again feel love for any mortal man, but I intend to make many of them feel it for me. I have but one ambition now, Armand, and that is, to be the most successful coquette of my day. You will give me position, prestige, and I can do the rest for myself."

Latour exclaimed:

"What a revelation from the lips of a girl of eighteen! People must grow old very soon in that trans-Atlantic country from which you came, Claire. You talk like a woman of fifty, who is disenchanted of everything. We must change all that, my dear child. But tell me, was there no one to take up your cause and punish your recreant husband for his conduct towards you? The young Quixote who ran off with you to-day against your will, was too glad of the result, I suppose, to interfere in any way. I only wish that I had been there."

"I am very glad you were not, for your life is too important to me to be pitted against that of Walter Thorne. His day of humiliation will come—*shall come*—so leave him to such happiness as he may find in the gilded bondage into which he has sold himself. *I can wait.* When Andrew learned how shamefully I had been thrust away, he would have avenged me, but I would not permit it. I shall fight *that* battle single-handed, and yet bring my faithless husband to my feet. What I shall then do with him, Gods knows! but he shall surely drink of the cup of humiliation he pressed to my lips. In the meantime I shall perfect my weapons, and make myself unrivalled in the art of fascination."

She smiled up in his face so brightly that Latour exclaimed:

You must be trying to mystify me, Claire. If all this were true, you could never speak of that wretched past in so light a tone."

"If 'there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous,' there is no more from tragedy to comedy. I have taken it, that is all. The anguish has exhausted itself, leaving a deadly vacuum behind, which must be filled by the follies of life, or ache and burn forever. I prefer the first to the last, and I intend to be a very Euphrosyne. Three years are a long time at my age, Armand. The wounds have scarred over; I care nothing now for him who inflicted them, and I find myself in that enviable position coveted by one of my sex—'Young, rich and a widow.' You need not add 'bewitched,' as vulgar people in my country call a deserted wife, though I have no objection to being called bewitching," and Claire arose and courtesied with a grace and piquancy that were irresistible.

Her brother laughed and replied :

"I find you so, at all events. Your being a widow will simplify our manège. I was thinking that I would ask a cousin of mine to matronize you, as you are too young and lovely to be left to enter society without a chaperone; but widows are privileged, and you can do without Madame Laroche, if you choose."

"I certainly shall *not* choose to have a duenna placed over me. Let your venerable relative alone, for I assure you I can do admirably without her. I intend to be free as air, bright as the sunshine, and gay among the gayest. I hope you are fond of society, *mon frère*?"

"Not very; I have had my day, and of late years I have given myself up to a very absorbing pursuit. But

I have friends who will take you out as often as you wish. I can place you in a very pleasant and unexceptionable clique when I take you to reside in the city of delights, as an Oriental would call Paris."

"That will do very well. I have little shyness, though I have been reared in the backwoods, as you would consider the interior of Virginia. I shall make my way and establish a position for myself as queen of hearts. I intend to be that or nothing."

The grave face of the listener relaxed into a smile, and he said:

"You are quite a new study to me, Claire. You are unlike all the other women I have ever known."

"Yes—in one respect—I am not conventional. I speak from impulse, and I am perfectly frank. As you see me now, I shall always be."

"Really—I find you enchanting; but the dark hour must come on you sometimes. No one can be uniformly gay and bright."

"No one with a heart; but as I told you before, mine is dead. In the place of the thing that once fluttered and struggled with anguish, is a quiet organ that performs the physical functions of life, but says nothing to my sentimentalism. Like Mary of Scotland, I can compare my heart to nothing save the diamond, for it is cold, hard and glittering; ready to shine or to cut, as the need may be, but never again to thrill with emotion or quiver with pain. That phase is over, thank Heaven, and through suffering I have won the right to triumph over other hearts in my turn; to avenge upon the whole false sex, save yourself, the bitter wrong I have met at the hands of one among them."

"Your words are steeped in bitterness, Claire,

though your tone is cold. My child, I might as reasonably dedicate my life to a crusade against women as you against men, for I have had as great provocation as yourself. In one respect, our destinies are alike, for I am a deserted husband."

"You! I did not know that you had ever been married."

"That is not surprising, considering how little you know about me. You have had no reserve toward me, and I will show none to you. Come with me to my sanctum, and I will explain to you the cause of the long estrangement between my father and myself, and show you how intimately my matrimonial unhappiness was connected with that unfortunate disagreement."

Latour touched a small bell, and Zolande reappeared, followed by an old, gray-haired man who keenly scrutinized the fair face of the new inmate. His master said:

"Ah! Pierre, so you have returned from Paris. Have you executed all my commissions?"

"All of them, Monsieur, and the things you ordered are in the tower. You will find all right when you go up."

"Thanks—and now let me present my sister to you. Your old master married in America, and this young lady is his daughter."

Pierre bowed low to Claire, and said:

"Welcome, Mademoiselle. I can see the family likeness, although my old woman can't. You are a true Lapierre, my lady."

Claire smiled and said:

"I am glad you are not so difficult to convince of my relationship to my brother as your wife was."

Whether I resemble Armand or not, I am really his sister."

"Yes—and to be treated with the respect due to the mistress of my house. Claire is very young, but I think she will prove herself quite capable of ruling the chateau."

The old retainer bowed, but he muttered inaudibly:

"I don't doubt she *will* rule it, and you too, for you are too soft-hearted where women are concerned, badly as one has treated you."

"What is that you are saying, sir?" asked Latour.

"Oh, nothing, Monsieur. I was only thinking aloud what a kind and noble gentleman you are to take to your new sister so quick, though you found her under such queer circumstances. I stopped at the lodge as I came back, and Antoine told me about what happened there this afternoon."

M. Latour flushed angrily, and he sharply said:

"It will be best for both you and Antoine to keep your own counsel about that. It will not be well for either of you if that attempted abduction becomes a subject of gossip. Do you understand?"

With sudden humility Pierre replied:

"It shall not through me, Monsieur. I met the young man driving back to Paris like one mad. I don't wonder that he felt badly after losing such an angel of beauty as Mademoiselle."

"There—that will do, Pierre. You and your wife can drink a bottle of wine to my sister's health, and if any curiosity is expressed about her, you can explain that she came to France three years ago under the protection of Mrs. Courtney, a wealthy American lady, who placed her in a boarding-school to complete her

education. That is enough for *your* world to know; to *mine*, I shall make my own statements."

"Thank you, Monsieur. Both Zolande and I are quite satisfied with our new chatelaine."

Latour moved his hand, and the two left the room. He then said:

"Come, Claire, the laboratory is lighted, and I will show you the dingy theatre in which *my* triumph will be won. Yours will be gained before the footlights, amid all the glitter and glare of falsehood and vanity; yet I would scarcely consent to exchange with you."

"Are you a magician? and are you taking me to the enchanted chamber in which your magic mirror is kept? If you have such a thing, pray bring before me the past scenes of my life. I should like that story about Cornelius Agrippa to be proved true."

"I am afraid I shall scarcely be able to allay your doubts of its authenticity. I have magic glasses in abundance, but they are not reflecting ones."

"What then are they?"

"Crucibles—retorts, and so forth, but a magician's wand could scarcely evoke greater marvels than I intend to produce from mine."

"Umph! only a chemist, after all," was the rather contemptuous rejoinder. "It is a dreadful fall to come down from the realms of magic to the prosy realities of life."

"*Prosy!* if you knew anything of *my* magic, you would call it anything but that. It is the most wonderful science known, and opens vistas to the imagination to which even poets dare not soar. It unlocks the secrets of nature, places the able experimenter on an elevation worthy of a demi-god, and gives to a crea-

ture of time the power of a superior intelligence. Oh, it is grand—stupendous ! ”

While they were speaking thus, the two crossed the vestibule, and entered a long, flagged passage feebly lighted by a lamp held in the hand of a figure in armor which stood in a recess about half way to a flight of stone steps that wound upward for many feet. Lamps were placed on brackets at certain intervals, and Claire followed her brother, wondering if she should find anything at the end of her pilgrimage to repay her for the trouble of mounting that long flight of stairs.

They at length gained a platform on which opened a massive door, and M. Latour threw it back, saying :

“ Enter my sanctum : and know at the same time that since it was dedicated to its present use the foot of no other woman has ever trodden its floor. I intend to take you entirely into my confidence, Claire, for you would never rest contented if I attempted any mystery with you. I shall explain to you what gives an interest to my arid life, and I think that I can trust to your discretion to reveal nothing that can annoy me.”

“ Of course you may, but I cannot see how I am to tell anything about your experiments, for I know little enough of your pet science, and I am too much afraid of being blown up to witness any of them.”

They entered a large octagon room, brilliantly lighted by an iron chandelier that hung from the centre of the ceiling. On one side of this apartment a furnace was built, and on long tables placed against the walls were the strangely fashioned instruments used by the chemist. A quantity of fuel was piled up ready for use, and on a large desk lay a number of bars of lead.

A couch, with a mattress and pillows, stood between two of the long, narrow windows, near which was a single lounging chair, comfortably cushioned.

Latour looked around and said:

"I am glad to get back to the old place again, for after all, this homely room is the home of my heart, and I have found in it more true happiness than in any other place on earth."

"What a weary life yours must have been, Armand. I do hope that I may be able to brighten it a little, now that I have come to live with you. Since you will give me so much, I shall feel bound to make you happy, if I can."

"Ah! if you can. Well, yes, certainly a great deal is in your power. I am not a sentimental dreamer, Claire. I have made up my mind to the inevitable, and I try to glean from the lees of life left me, such enjoyment as is possible. As long as God gives life, he gives something to live for; that is my philosophy."

"I dare say it is as good as any other. It takes a great deal of philosophy to get through this world tolerably, at any rate. I once thought the future a fairy dream, but the delusion was brief enough, and here am I at eighteen, as old in heart as if I were eighty. But I intend to get my share of amusement out of life, if I fail in everything else. I will stay with you, and together we will abuse the world that has ceased to charm us."

"You are too young to turn cynic yet, Claire. In the adoration you must win, in the incense that must be offered at so peerless a shrine, you will find such intoxicating delight that it will be long before you complain that there are no more hearts to conquer."

"Yet a time may come when I shall weep as Alexander did, but it shall not be maudlin weeping, as I suspect his was. There, I think we have talked nonsense enough, and now to business. In spite of my levity, I am most anxious to hear the story you have promised me, for I like you well enough to wish to exonerate you from all blame in the past."

"Then you have been taught to blame me, Claire," he sadly said. "My father would not leave you free to love me without a doubt coming between us."

"Our father never spoke of you to me but twice, and that was shortly before his death. That you had suffered him to remain poor, while you were rich, was what I thought most of. He never fully explained what occurred to sever you so completely from him. To you I look, to-night, for that explanation."

"And you shall have it. I brought you hither that you might listen to my vindication, on the spot on which the last interview between my father and myself took place. It is now many years since he sat in that chair, and spoke the cruel words that sundered us forever. Committed the—but I will not forestal my story. You must hear it in sequence, that you may fully understand it, and do me tardy justice. Be seated, Claire, for it will take some time to relate what I have to tell."

In place of obeying him, she went to the desk and attempted to lift a package of the lead. She asked:

"Why are these placed here? They can be of no use to you in your experiments."

"Do you think so? Ha! ha!—see how ignorant you are. Those were brought here by my order, that I may test with them the secret I traveled even to Per-

sia to obtain. I believe it to be now mine—though, as yet, I have made no use of it. I reserved my crowning experiment for the old tower to witness.”

Claire listened, half-bewildered, but she awaited an explanation without speaking. Latour went on :

“Feel the weight of that ponderous package and fancy what its value will be when transmuted into one of the precious metals ; and not that alone, but hundreds of others like it can I, by my skill, turn into gold. My hordes shall be countless—my power great as that of the spirit that dwelt in Aladdin’s fabled lamp. Such is the secret I promised to confide to you, and I ask you to hold it inviolate for the present, both for your sake and my own.”

Claire incredulously asked :

“Do you really believe, Armand, that by any chemical art you can transmute this heavy, common metal into glittering gold? My poor brother, I am afraid you are the victim of a delusion that will only impoverish you. I have read of such experiments, but those who made them died ruined or mad. Perhaps I have been sent to you to warn you from the precipice on which you stand, and lure you back to the common pursuits of life.”

She went up to him as she spoke, laid her hand caressingly upon his shoulder, and looked into his face. It was perfectly tranquil, and he seemed as if he had scarcely heard her words. He calmly said :

“That is the common cant of the world. I have heard it before, but it passed by me as the idle wind. I can afford to disregard it, for I have my own convictions, based on certainty. I do not expect you to be wiser than your day and generation, Claire ; but I

have seen that base metal transmuted into gold myself. Nay, I have assisted at it, and I feel assured that I now know enough to accomplish it myself. I saw Osman Melitki put the lead in the crucible and take from it the virgin gold, without alloy. I paid him an enormous price to witness the experiment; but what I have seen I know, so why should you doubt my power to do the same?"

"But may he not have practised a trick on you? Those Eastern people are so clever at legerdemain that such a thing might have been done."

M. Latour disdainfully replied:

"If you understood chemistry you would not think a deception of that kind so easy. It was possible, but I scarcely think my coadjutor would have attempted one with *me*. No—we acted in good faith toward each other, and I am sure that Melitki would no more have made an effort to deceive me than I would with him. Here is a ring made with that gold, and I assure you it is perfectly pure."

He held up his hand, on the fourth finger of which was a heavy hoop of gold, with cabalistic figures engraved upon it, and asked:

"What do you think of that, now, Mademoiselle Incredulous?"

"Claire quickly replied:

"I think it is fine gold, but I have yet to be convinced that it was once nothing but lead. However, let us not discuss that question now, but give me the explanation you promised."

"Sit down in that large chair then, and I will commence."

CHAPTER V.

ARMAND'S HISTORY.

CLAIRE threw herself upon the seat, and Latour took his place on the side of the couch; he sat some moments pondering over the past, trying to recal with vividness those long vanished days, with all their bitterness and heart-burning.

At length he raised his eyes, fixed them steadily upon her, and commenced in clear, measured tones:

“In those days, when I was all in all to my father, I was the only creature he had to love, for my mother died when I was very young, and he transferred to me the affection he had felt for her. I was never permitted to feel her loss; all that the most tender thoughtfulness could bestow was lavished on me; and as I grew to man's estate, my father showed the utmost confidence in my judgment and capacity for business.

“He was then at the head of a large banking establishment, and enjoyed a European celebrity for financial ability. He endeavored to train my mind to the same pursuit, but I had other tastes which conflicted with his wishes; my intellect possessed a wider range than his, and the dry details of business could not satisfy me or fill my thoughts to the exclusion of things I found more attractive.

“To induce me to yield my tastes to his wishes, he offered me a great bribe; when I had barely attained my majority, a partnership in the firm was proposed to me, on the condition that I should devote all my

energies to the business. I accepted it reluctantly, for I felt that it was a snare under a brilliant guise ; but I did accept it, and for three years I made myself a martyr to the firm. My father was so well satisfied with my management, that at the end of that time he ventured to make an extensive tour, leaving the affairs of the house in my hands.

“Alas, he chose the worst possible time for his travels. I had not long before seen a beautiful girl with whom I had fallen madly in love. I was dreaming only of Josephine Le Blonde, when I should have been watching the money market. I idled away the time in her society, which should have been employed in watching those around me.”

“The cashier in our establishment was implicitly trusted by both my father and myself, but after events proved that he had long watched for an opportunity to rob the house.

“He found it now. A commercial crisis was impending, and I was unprepared for it. I used the credit of the firm to borrow from our personal friends, and I believed we would be able to weather the storm. I still think we should have done so, if I had not gone into the country on a visit to Josephine, leaving the affairs of the firm to be managed by Bellair in my absence.

“That night he disappeared, and with him the funds I had received from my friends. Six millions of francs in notes and gold, were taken and none of them could ever be traced. The robbery had been carefully prepared for, and not a clue to its perpetrator could be discovered.

“Bellair's flight was a death-blow to the credit of

Lapierre & Son, and my father came home to find ruin in the shape most terrible to him. You do not understand what it is to a mercantile man to lose the prestige he has won through years of successful toil; to sink down among the dishonored herd of speculators who have failed to meet their engagements through want of tact or lack of honesty. It is difficult for those who suffer from a failure to distinguish between the two, and obloquy is visited alike on the unsuccessful honest man and on the swindler.

“Our poor father had an almost morbid sense of honor, and he was outraged in the most sensitive part of his nature. The account books had been given into my charge, but for many months I had suffered Bellair to keep them in his possession, for I was so much infatuated with the false woman who held me in her toils, that I was glad to shift the responsibility to one who seemed so willing to accept it, and I devoted the time thus gained to my fair idol.

“Bellair was a plausible man, and for years he had possessed the unlimited trust of every one in the establishment; but he was that most dangerous of all knaves—a man who assumes an appearance of truth and probity only that he may gain power for a grand villainy when the favorable opportunity arrives.

“But for my carelessness, it could never have arisen, and for that I shall always blame myself; but I swear to you that I was guiltless of any thought of wrong. I believed the integrity of Bellair as impregnable as my own—his interest in Lapierre & Son scarcely inferior to that felt by my father himself.

“When the books were exhibited, it was found that false entries had been made; large deposits were not

accounted for at all, though the men who had trusted us held vouchers for them. Nothing saved me from prosecution but the most positive proof that, for months past, the books had been kept entirely by the wretch who had consummated our ruin.

“The crash was complete, and when our business was wound up, it was found that we could scarcely pay half our liabilities by sacrificing every available portion of the property we possessed.

“I cannot tell you what I suffered in those days, Claire, for I had not only financial ruin to face, but also to bear the burden of broken hopes and outraged affections. My father opposed my union with Josephine Le Blonde, for she was not in our sphere of life. He declared that she was vain, giddy, and utterly unsuited to me as a wife; but I was madly in love with her, and I could see no flaw in the lovely being I had set up as an idol in the sanctuary of my heart.

“Josephine possessed no fortune, and I determined to endow her with a small estate my father had purchased and settled on me when I attained my twenty-first year. I considered this property mine to do as I pleased with; and two weeks before the knowledge of our ruin came to me, I privately married Josephine, and gave it to her as a bridal present.

“The settlements were drawn up in such a manner as to give my wife exclusive control of the income of ten thousand francs arising from the estate. At the time I did this, I considered such a sum a mere bagatelle, for I annually spent five times the amount on my own pleasures.

“When the settlement with our creditors was made, my father gave in that as a portion of the assets, and I

was forced to avow my marriage and show that I had placed the property beyond my own control. I had never seen him angry before, but now his rage was terrible. I thought then, and I still believe, that he was suffering from temporary insanity; in no other way can I excuse what followed, for I, too, have had my wrongs to bear, and they have been deep and bitter.

“Some of those who had suffered loss through us declared that I had taken care to provide for myself, and it was even insinuated that I was in league with the villian who had robbed us—that I shared with him the spoils he had secured.

“No one had the hardihood to accuse me openly, for there was no proof of collusion on my part, and each one hesitated to give the charge a tangible shape. But my poor father heard those things whispered; he was maddened by them, and he came hither to seek and accuse me himself.

“This old tower had descended to me from my mother, and with the few acres that were then attached to it, was held by a tenure that was inalienable. It was of too little value at any rate to be cared for by our creditors, and I was allowed to retain it. I had taken refuge here to gain time for reflection and to settle on some plan to retrieve our broken fortunes.

“To restore them I was resolved, cost what labor it might. To repay both principal and interest to those who had lost by us I fully intended, if all the years of my life were devoted to that purpose. I had written to Josephine that I would go to her when I had definitely settled my plans, for even then I intuitively felt that from her I should receive but little consolation.

I had seen her once after the final crash, and she so openly betrayed her chagrin at finding herself the wife of a poor man, when she thought she had married a millionaire, that I was struck to the heart by her worldliness, and knew too late that the estimate placed upon her by my father was the true one.

“Sorely wounded in spirit, almost hopeless of the future that lay before me, I immured myself in this solitude to regain my courage, to strengthen the armor of my soul for the stern struggle I knew I must make to save my good name and go among men once more with lofty front, unsoiled by suspicion of wrong to others.

“I was pacing the floor of this room, thinking almost to madness, when my father came in and threw himself upon the chair you now occupy. He looked old, haggard, and wild, and he carried his hand in his bosom as if something was concealed there that he was anxious to assure himself was quite safe. He glared on me with an expression I could not interpret, and after a pause said:

“‘It is consummated; we have sunk down—down from the pinnacle of prosperity, to obloquy and ignominy; and I, unhappy father that I am, I have not even the right to defend my own son. If I am exonerated from fraud, it is at his expense; and those have been found who even dare to say that I am to be supported from the property that has been secured to that woman you claim as your wife. I would sooner beg from door to door—sooner starve than touch a crust beneath the roof that owns her for its mistress—the cozening Delilah who has shorn you of your honor and your self-respect.’

“ ‘No, not of either,’ I replied. ‘I will live down the slanders of which I have been made the victim, and yet prove to those who have trusted us that we were fully worthy of their confidence. As to my wife, since she stands in that relation to me, I ask that you will speak of her with less acrimony, or not name her at all. I have been infatuated by her to that degree that I have lost all in gaining her; but being mine, I am bound to protect her even from you. I do not ask you to accept anything from her; I shall take nothing from her resources myself, for I intend to labor for bread for you and myself, and also for something more.’

“ With a dreary sigh, he asked :

“ ‘Who will give employment to the dishonored bankrupt? The opportunity to regain your lost prestige will never be afforded you. No man will trust you—no one—no one.’

“ ‘Then we will emigrate,’ I said. ‘There are lands in which money can be accumulated more rapidly than in France. We will go together to the East Indies. We have correspondents there who will aid both you and me to get into business. I am young and strong, and I will bear the heat and burden of the battle that is to be waged. I will yet repay those men to the uttermost farthing of what we owe them, and the name of Lapierre shall be as untarnished as it was before the wretched failure.’

“ He shook his head, and moodily said :

“ ‘But you forget your wife. What is to become of her if this fine plan is carried into effect?’

“ ‘Of course she must accompany me in my exile, but you need not live with us unless Josephine be-

comes more pleasant in your sight. When you know that she and you are the only beings I love, you should suffer your heart to open to her.'

" 'Oh, my poor deluded boy!' he passionately cried. 'Do you in truth love this false syren who has lured you to destruction? But for *her*, you would have been faithful to the trust reposed in you; you would have guarded the interests confided to you even with your life, but she led you away, she bewitched you to that degree that everything was forgotten but her fair face and beguiling tongue. To her I owe the ruin that has overtaken me, and never, as I hope for mercy, will I forgive her.'

" He looked like a maniac as he uttered those words, and I endeavored to soothe him by saying:

" 'Josephine shall help me to retrieve the misfortunes she is wrongfully accused of causing. It was not her fault that I lost my head about her. I alone am to blame. In time your feelings must soften toward one who has really committed no offence against you, and you will revoke what you have just said.'

" He looked at me very strangely, and still kept his hand inside his vest, but I could not imagine that he meant to do me any bodily injury. I felt certain that he had a pistol concealed there, but my only fear was that he meditated suicide. After a silence of some length, he asked:

" 'Do you persist in clinging to that woman, although I tell you that she and I are antagonisms—that we can never dwell together beneath the same roof? Yet you are my only child, and from your infancy you have been the one joy and hope of my heart. Will you give me up for *her*?'

“ ‘If you insist that I must sacrifice one or the other the law of God must decide for me,’ I replied, ‘but my affection for my wife is not incompatible with the filial duty I owe to you.’

“ ‘Filial d——l,’ he cried in a transport of fury. I’ll have none of that twaddle. You either belong to me or to her, and you shall choose between us. Would *she* help you to build up your credit anew, do you think? Would such a woman as I know her to be, submit to a single privation to restore tarnished honor? Would she give up the slightest caprice for your sake? *No*—a thousand times no, and you will yet find out all the hollowness of her nature. It maddens me to know that for her sake, you have trifled away all that is most precious to manhood—self-respect, independence, brilliant prospects—all given for a doll who thinks only of her own beauty, of the luxury she loves much better than she has ever loved you.’

“ His words were so true that they stung me to the quick. I angrily said :

“ ‘Cease, sir, to vilify my wife, I have married her—she is mine to defend, even from the attacks of my own father.’

“ ‘Yes—and to sustain at the expense of all that should be dear to you. But that shall never be ; since she would alienate you from me, and make you her dishonored slave, I will play the part of Brutus, and take the life I gave.’

“ With the rapidity of lightning, he drew forth his pistol and fired twice at me before I could make an effort to evade him.”

Claire uttered an exclamation of horror.

“ Is it possible that my father tried to take your life,

Armand. He told me nothing of this. Ah! you have indeed had much to bear."

Latour threw open the bosom of his shirt, and pointed to two scars upon his breast.

"The balls entered here, and I fell, as he thought, dead. As I told you before, I believe he was deranged when he committed the deed.

"When it was accomplished, he rushed down the stair-case, and left the house without saying a word to any one: but my old nurse caught a glimpse of his white face as he mounted his horse, and alarmed, she scarcely knew why, she came up to the tower to see if all was well with me.

"You may imagine her consternation when she found me lying upon the floor in a pool of my own blood. She lifted me to the couch, and staunching the wounds as well as possible, left me a few moments to send her husband for a surgeon.

"It is useless to dwell on all that happened then. I lay ill for many weeks; my father effected his escape from France, and sailed for the United States. I do not know if remorse haunted him for the deed he had committed in a moment of frenzy, for he never wrote to me, though he was aware of my convalescence.

"I sent a letter to him to Philadelphia as soon as I was able to hold a pen, for to that city I knew he had gone, through one of the few friends he trusted. No notice was taken of my appeal, and I was too proud to make another attempt to conciliate one who owed me some reparation for the suffering he had inflicted on me.

"Had my father written to me, I would have told him that the chief obstacle to our re-union was re-

moved, for my wife refused to visit me in my illness, and demanded a separation from me. She wrote me the most heartless and cruel letter, informing me that I had deceived her when I married her; that I must have been aware of the ruin which impended over me before our union. She wound up by saying that another suitor less wealthy than she believed me to be was preferred to me, but she had sacrificed her inclinations to the gratification of her pride, and had given me her hand in the full confidence that I could bestow on her the splendor I had so often promised. She declared that she regarded marriage in the light of a business contract, and the party that failed to redeem all his or her promises, merited repudiation. She asked me to give her back her freedom, that she might bestow her hand on the man she preferred to me. At the same time she plainly stated that she expected to be permitted to retain the estate I had settled on her, as compensation for the wrong she had suffered at my hands."

Claire again exclaimed, but Latour raised his hand and frigidly said :

"No comments, if you please, Claire. I can tell this, but even at this distance of time I cannot bear to hear Josephine harshly spoken of by any one save myself. That is the right I have purchased through suffering, but it is accorded to no one else."

After a pause he again went on :

"How I lived through those days I have never been able to understand; but I think it was my resolution to re-establish my financial credit that gave me strength to bear up under the double load that was crushing me to the earth. *That* was something to live for, even if a false woman had deserted me.

“Zolande is an excellent nurse, and I was lucky enough to have the attendance of a skillful surgeon; through their unremitting care I was restored to the power to act, and think for myself. The first use I made of my restored health was to petition for a dissolution of the tie that had become as odious to me as it was oppressive to Josephine. I had wrecked my life for the sake of this woman, and she refused to share hers with me. The knowledge that she wished to be free from me sufficed to disenchant me; I saw through all the shallow pretences that had ensnared me, and led me a captive to her slightest wish.

“Outwardly she was beautiful, and I had gifted her with all nobleness and excellence of nature; stripped of my ideal attributes, she now stood before me in her true colors, and I loathed her more deeply than I had once loved her. After the first shock was over I do not think I suffered much on her account; scorn swallowed up anguish, and a huge self-contempt that I had been so sweetly befooled by this heartless syren, overcame even my regrets for the isolation to which she had condemned me. I felt almost as cynical as Timon, but I would not suffer myself to mourn over what I had lost.”

His voice suddenly sunk, and his companion saw that even at this distance of time it was bitter to him to recal those days of darkness. She broke the silence that ensued, by asking:

“Did you allow that woman to retain the property of which you spoke? I should have wrested it from her at all hazards.”

“I could not do so without a lawsuit, and I made the settlement so secure, that the lawyers doubted my

power to undo it. I suffered her to keep it; she disposed of it without delay, and disappeared, I did not care whither. It was years before I obtained a clue to my rival, or learned what had become of the fair traitress. Only then did I know how unutterably base she had been to retain that money.

“With restored health, I had but one object in view, and that was to accumulate the means of repaying those who had suffered through my culpable neglect of the business intrusted to me. The surgeon who attended me in my illness became my warm personal friend, and he espoused my cause wherever he heard me spoken of. He did more than this, for he was a man of large heart, and keen sense of justice. He saw that I only needed a chance to repair the disasters of our failure, and he used his influence to procure me a situation in a large mercantile establishment in China, of which his brother was the head.

“I had not a single tie to bind me to my native land, and I gladly accepted the exile that was offered me. I will lightly pass over the years I spent in that far distant land. I brought all my industry and business tact to the service of a liberal chief, already prepossessed in my favor by the praises of his brother. M. Dumot advanced me rapidly, and at the end of my third year of service he took me into the firm as a partner.

“In five more years I had redeemed the obligations I had taken on myself, and once more the name of Lapierre & Son stood untarnished before the world.

“After twelve years of drudgery I returned to France, rich and esteemed by those whose good opinion I cared to claim. In the interim my mother's cousin had died, leaving me the title I now bear, and a

few thousand francs per annum to sustain it. I tried the idle life of an aristocrat, but I was no longer young enough or gay enough to enjoy it. I gambled to pass away my time, lost large sums, and finding that I should ruin myself through sheer ennui, I gave up the attempt to be what neither nature nor education had fitted me for—a man of fashion.

“I went back to my old employment, and the banking house of Latour & Co. soon took as good a position in the financial world as that of Lapierre had once held. My partner is a thorough man of business, and at the end of the second year, I gave the principal control of the firm to him, and tried to fill the vacancy in my heart by the excitements of travel. That wearied me; in early youth I had a passion for chemistry, and it now revived. I had this laboratory fitted up that I might experiment when my steps were turned toward my own door, and in it I have found all the happiness my late years have known.

“I studied all the books that treat of my favorite science, and gradually the conviction came to my mind that the transmutation of metals is not an impossibility. I sought knowledge from every source, consulted either personally or by letter with all the learned chemists in the civilized world, and finally journeyed to the Orient to seek Omar Melitka, a learned Persian, who was said to possess occult secrets that were carefully withheld from the Christian world.

“From him I gained the clue I had so long sought, and a few more experiments must make me familiar with the wonderful process. I shall become the benefactor of my race; the gold into which I shall convert the inferior metals shall be poured forth with unstinted

hand to lift up the toiling millions of earth, and give to every struggling creature the means of securing a respectable subsistence. The working man shall be able to lay aside something from his labors, besides providing for the wants of those dependent upon him. Education shall be free to all classes, with such moral training as will lift the masses from the base position of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and they shall feel that they are men, responsible to God and their fellow-creatures for the actions of their daily lives. If long life is granted me, I shall accomplish much toward this renovation, and I shall bequeath my secret to those who will continue to use it only for the good of the human race. Too great wealth corrupts a nation, as all history proves, and I shall not allow my great discovery to become common property. It shall only be left in the hands of those who will know how to use it discreetly, and for the general good.

“But how can you be sure of that after you are gone?” asked Claire. “Your dream is a very beautiful one, but it seems to me impracticable. Gold procured at will from the baser metals, would lose its value as a commercial standard. Your secret is too wonderful to be kept concealed, and others would learn, and make an evil use of it. I do not pretend to be learned, but these objections strike me very forcibly.”

The glow his last words had brought to the cheek of the enthusiast died suddenly away, and after a pause he said :

“I have thought deeply of that, but when I am assured of success, I shall seek, and find the means of obviating all those difficulties. If God places such

power in my hands, he will show me how to use it for the greater benefit of his creatures."

Claire regarded him silently a few moments, and then said :

"You are a rare and noble man, Armand, and I ask your pardon sincerely for having so long thought unkindly of you. Circumstances drove me to you, or I should never have sought you out. Our father, who has passed beyond the veil, knows all now, and he understands how cruelly he misjudged you. If you had written to him after your return from China, he would have been reconciled to you, and have died happier."

"I *did* write. I sent my letter to Philadelphia, as that was the last place from which news from him had been received. It was returned to me with assurances that all clue to my father was lost. In the obscure valley in which he had concealed himself it was impossible to trace him; yet he must have had means of knowing that I lived—that I was the possessor of wealth, for he told you so, and suffered you to believe that I would not minister to his wants from my abundance. I think that he would never apply to me for aid, or make known his condition to me, because he could not bear to receive anything from the son whose life he had so insanely attempted to destroy. I suppose that he also continued to believe that Josephine stood as an eternal barrier to our reunion."

"I do not know; he never referred to her in the meagre confidence he gave to me. Let us not discuss his motives now, brother; he has passed to a higher tribunal than that of earth, and the true and pure soul, in spite of all his faults, has met recognition among his peers."

"I believe it," said Latour, reverently, "and I cherish the memory of his early kindness to me with tender respect: the rest I shall bury in oblivion, and never speak of it again. I should not have done so now but to place myself in my true position before you."

"That will be best, Armand. But tell me one thing more, before the painful past is closed. Where is your wife? What has been her fate? Your words lead me to believe that you are aware of it."

Latour arose, and walked the floor several moments. Suddenly pausing, in a changed voice, he rapidly said:

"It is your right, and you shall know even that, humiliating as it is to me to reveal the utter unworthiness of one I have so blindly loved.

"For years I heard nothing of Josephine; I had almost ceased to think of her, when chance threw her on my path, in a dying condition. I told you that I travelled extensively, after I withdrew from active partnership in the bank. Toward the close of the summer of 18—, I was at Carlsbad, for the benefit of the waters. In the cottage nearest to the one I inhabited was an invalid lady, who was evidently in reduced circumstances. She had with her, temporarily, an old woman of the village as nurse, for she could afford no servant of her own.

"In passing I often saw the pale and shadowy form of the invalid lying back in her large chair near the window, but it never occurred to me that this wasted, worn-out creature was the brilliant coquette who had won my heart only to crush it. Every vestige of the beauty that had enthralled me was gone: even the brilliant eyes that once had beamed on me with simulated tenderness had become hard, restless and repel-

ling in expression. The soul within had stamped itself upon the features, as its repulsive elements came into play through the life she had led—and a hollow-eyed, wrinkled hag met my view when I glanced toward her in passing.

“I turned from her with a feeling of loathing, without comprehending why this suffering creature did not appeal to my better feelings, as others in her condition always had done. I did not once dream that this wretched being was the idol I had once bowed blindly before, though some instinctive feeling caused me to recoil from her as from the blighting presence of something that was fatal to me.

“After seeing her once I could not drive her evil face from me; it haunted me like an incubus, and I determined to leave the place to rid myself of the disagreeable influence of that woman's vicinity.

“Late on the evening before my departure old Gretchen, her nurse, came into my cottage and abruptly said :

“ ‘Madam Blondeau wishes to see you before you go. She can't live many days longer, and she says you are an old acquaintance of hers, to whom she wishes to speak in private.’

“I listened to this statement in the greatest astonishment.

“ ‘An acquaintance of mine,’ I said; ‘you must be mistaken; I have never known a person of that name.’

“ ‘Oh! names don't signify, and she may not go by her true one. She knows *you*, at any rate, for the first time she ever saw you pass her window she fell into a sort of spasm, and she has been getting worse every day since. Monsieur will not refuse to go to a dying

woman who may have some message to send back by him to her friends, for Madam Blondeau is a country-woman of your own.'

" 'Of course I will go to her,' I replied, 'and will do all that lies in my power for one so unfortunately situated as this lady seems to be. You can go back and tell her that I will come over in half an hour.'

"Gretchen left me, and I vainly tried to remember when and where her charge had been known to me. I could not place her, for not once did the suspicion dawn on me of the identity of that phantom with the woman who had deceived me.

"I went to the interview deeply mystified, wondering what service would be required at my hands. Gretchen ushered me into the comfortless-looking room, and closed the door, leaving me alone with the invalid, who was reclining as usual, in her cushioned chair. The light was so placed that I could see but the outline of her attenuated figure as she lay back, panting for breath, and evidently greatly excited.

"I drew near her, more unmoved by her sufferings than I had thought it possible for me to be in the presence of one in her condition; but the very atmosphere she breathed seemed to repel me and stifle every emotion but that of curiosity to know why I had been summoned to her presence. She did not speak, and I sat down on the chair to which she motioned me, and said:

" 'You have something to say to me, I understand, madam. Though I cannot remember where we have met before, I am quite ready to comply with any reasonable request you may have to make of me.'

"In a hollow, harsh voice, unlike the seductive

tones I remembered as the broken melody of my wrecked life, she gasped :

“ ‘ *Mon dieu!* he does not know me. Am I, indeed, so changed as that, Armand? Has no thrilling memory of the past come to enlighten you as to the identity of the unhappy woman before you?’

“ My heart before so calm began to beat furiously ; I started up, grasped the lamp, and held it above her head, eagerly scanning the pale, pinched features. I cried out :

“ ‘ Who are you?—there is nothing about you that I recognize, yet your words point to the miserable tragedy of my life, and bid me recall its blasting memories. Woman! are you all that is left of the Circe that enthralled but to betray me? Yet that is impossible.’

“ She held up her hand, on which glittered a curious ring set with a carbuncle cut in the shape of a heart, and surrounded by points of gold, in each one of which gleamed a tiny ruby. I had given that bauble to Josephine before our union, and she retained it, as she did all the costly presents I had made her. By that token alone I knew her, and I staggered from her side like a man smitten by lightning, and replaced the lamp with a crash upon the table from which I had taken it.

“ Oh, the unutterable horror of that moment! I can never put it in words, nor will I attempt to do so. I felt faint and sick, and my first impulse was to rush from the room ; but she grasped my arm with her talon-like hand, and held me in a clutch like that of death itself. She hoarsely said :

“ ‘ You know me now, and should comprehend why I must speak with you before I die.’

"I desperately said :

" 'I wish to hear nothing from you. You were once the curse of my life, but I have cast from me the memory of the past you wish to evoke. I will not stay to hear such confession as you may wish to make. It is of no interest to me. Die as you have so long lived, uncared for by me—less than nothing to me.'

"In a cold tone, she replied :

" 'I expected nothing more from you than scorn and aversion. They do not wound me, for I never loved you. I did not send for you to speak of myself, but of the man who so cleverly compassed your ruin and secured the wealth for which your father had so long labored. Have you no desire to know whither Bellair went? by what means he evaded those set upon his track? I can tell you that and also enlighten you as to another wrong from him that, through all these years, you have not suspected.'

"I paused at those words, and said :

" 'If you can tell me that, I will listen to you—odious as your presence is to me. Where is Bellair now? What has become of him?'

"With a ghastly sneer, she said :

" 'I thought I could interest you before we parted. You never suspected that *he* had made ardent love to me, from the day you first brought him to my aunt's house; but he did, and I preferred him to you. I stifled my preference, for he was not rich, and you were, or I believed you to be. I knew that your father vehemently opposed our union; and fearful of losing the prize I thought I had won, I foolishly consented to a private marriage.

" 'Bellair came to me, a few days afterward, and

showing me the ruin that was impending over you, entreated me to break with you. He did not tell me that he intended to become the agent of that ruin, or how it was to be effected, but he implored me to free myself from you and consent to fly with him to some distant land in which we would dwell together in luxury. He said that wealth had recently fallen to him which would realize my wildest dreams of splendor.

“ ‘When I told him of the tie that existed between us, I thought he would have gone mad with jealous fury. Bellair was older than I by many years, yet I loved him even as he loved me, and I pledged myself to go at his summons and leave the impoverished dupe, who would then have nothing more to bestow upon me.

“ ‘Bellair assured me that he had large sums securely invested in the United States, and I should reign there as a queen in society, with every wish of my vain heart gratified to the utmost extent of his fortune. I agreed to all he proposed, for a life passed in poverty with you had no charms for me; but with *him*—ah! it was joy, happiness unutterable to think of the free, untrammelled future that opened before me shared with the man of my heart.

“ ‘I cared not how his wealth had been obtained, provided I shared it with him. You know what followed. The divorce I asked was granted; the small estate you had given me I was allowed to retain, and the proceeds of its sale I carried with me to swell the hordes I then knew that my lover had secured from the same coffers. Do you know why I was guilty of that crowning baseness, Armand Latour?’

“I was too much stunned by this revelation to make any reply, and Josephine vindictively went on :

“ ‘That was my vengeance upon your father for his insulting objections to our union. I meant to ruin *him* utterly and hopelessly ; as to you, you had youth and energy—you could reinstate yourself in time,—but to him the blow was final.’

“I found voice to ask :

“ ‘Whither did you go ? Where did Bellair conceal himself till you joined him ?’

“ ‘He went to Louisiana, where French society was to be found. There, under the assumed name of Blondeau, he purchased, a fine plantation on the coast above New Orleans, which was highly improved. When I joined him six months later, I found him thoroughly settled and everything in readiness for my reception. We were married in the cathedral in New Orleans, and I went to the home he had prepared for me.

“ ‘For several years afterward we led a life well suited to me. We spent the winters in New Orleans, the spring and later part of autumn on our beautiful place, and the summers in traveling through the Northern States, scattering money as if it had been dross. I was admired, copied, and my wit quoted wherever I appeared.

“ ‘For a few years I was happy, for I felt no remorse for the past and had no misgivings as to the future. I think I was born without a conscience, for even now, fallen as I am, I cannot regret the golden years purchased by my treachery to you. I led the gay and brilliant life for which I had always pined, and why should I regret the price paid for it by two men, one

of whom had insulted me, and the other utterly indifferent to me? I did not send for you to prove to you that I have repented, for if it were to do over again, I should take the same course.'

"I sternly asked:

"'For what purpose then have you summoned me hither? I could well have gone to my grave without hearing this revelation, and it was by no means necessary for you to exhibit to me any new proofs of your baseness. I have long comprehended that, and cast you down into the depths of contempt so utterly that no vestige of my old madness remains. You have been scarcely a memory to me for years past.'

"With a sneer she said:

"'Yet you have never married again. Why was that, if I held no power over you?'

"'I have had little time to think of women,' I coldly replied. 'For years my life was devoted to the duty I felt to be imperative upon me. The stolen money *you* revelled on I labored to repay, that no stain might rest upon the honored name of the parent I had been the cause of ruining. Then, my own fortune was to make; since that was accomplished I have found contentment in travel and the resources of my own mind. With my experience of *one* woman, I was not likely to shackle myself with any other. But what has brought you here alone, and evidently impoverished?'

"'So you wish to hear the end of that glittering career?—to trace the steps by which I have fallen so low as to compel me to make an appeal to you,—but of that presently.

"'My husband was a gambler at heart. He not

only risked and lost large sums at cards, but he speculated wildly in the hope that the ruin he was bringing on himself might be averted. His schemes of aggrandizement only hastened his downfall, but we kept up our extravagant style of living for many years before the final crash came. Then he committed suicide, leaving me to bear what he had thus escaped from as I best could.

“ ‘The dissipated life I had led had told on my beauty; I found myself widowed, old in appearance, and nearly penniless. A few thousand dollars were saved for me from the wreck of the estate, and I came back to Europe in search of the health I had lost. For five years I have wandered over this continent alone. My means have gradually dwindled down till I am nearly penniless. I am dying, as you see, and the small sum I have left will not pay the debts I have incurred here. This bauble might suffice to bury me, for it is curious and valuable. I sent for you to see if you would purchase it back, and thus afford me the means of a decent funeral.’

“ ‘She took from her thin finger the engagement ring I had placed there so long ago, held it toward me, and with a hollow sneer went on:

“ ‘It was a strange fancy to select a thing like this for a *gage d’amour*. The rubies on the points are like drops of blood, and I have often thought how true an emblem they are of the anguish I have brought to you. A heart weeping blood—a curious choice indeed for an engagement ring.’

“ ‘Her voice sounded to me mocking and hard. I snatched the gem, threw it upon the floor, and ground it to powder beneath the heel of my boot. Then turning to her, I said:

“ ‘I understand now why I have been sent for. You knew that I would not leave the woman who once bore my name to be buried as a pauper, utterly unworthy as you are. But I will not give money to *you*. I will see the landlord and make arrangements to settle for what you may need, and to pay the expenses of a quiet funeral when you are dead. Now I will go, since I have no further business.’

“ Josephine calmly replied :

“ ‘That is all I require. Let me be comfortable as long as I live—that is all I ask now.’

“ As I turned away I said :

“ ‘I will send a priest to you, for you are not fit to die and go before your Maker in your present state of mind.’

“ With a hollow, mocking laugh she said :

“ ‘It is too late for repentance, now. My life has been given to the pursuit of pleasure, and God will not take the lees when the sparkling draught has been drained to the dregs without a thought of Him or his requirements. Besides, in Heaven I should not meet my twin soul, my love, my tempter. In some lower abode prepared for such as he and I, will I join him and bear with him the penalty of our joint sins. Farewell, Armand ; I do not ask your forgiveness, for I know it would be vain to do so.’

“ I fled from the room and closed the door after me. I will not attempt to describe to you the whirl of feeling in which the hours of that long night were passed. I did not leave Carlsbad with the dawn, as I intended, for I was too ill in mind and body to travel.

“ For three days I remained in my room, and every evening Gretchen came, unbidden, to let me know

how rapidly her charge was sinking. I would have got away if I could, but some horrible spell seemed to bind me to the spot. I sent for the landlord and settled with him what was to be done for the comfort of the sick woman, and everything she needed was provided for at my expense.

“Josephine died as she had lived, unpenitent, callous as to the future. She refused to see the priest I persisted in sending to her; but I consoled myself with the thought that I had done my duty by her, terribly as I had suffered at her hands.

“On the third day after our interview she passed away; and I remained till the grave closed over her, though I did not follow her to it.”

Latour sat down as if exhausted by this painful recital, and it was several moments before either spoke. Claire then said:

“Let us never refer to that dreadful woman again, Armand. I am glad that you have told me about her, for your conduct to her proves to me that you have been true to yourself through all your trials. Oh, how much I wish that I was more like you, but our natures are different. You returned good for evil, while I—I think of nothing but paying back wrong for wrong.”

Latour gently replied:

“My dear Claire, I will try to make you happy in your new sphere, and that will take the sting from the past. The wrong you have suffered was great, but you can put even that aside, and in time almost forget it. A worthless man should not have the power to darken your whole life.”

“That may be true, but what have I to occupy me till oblivion comes to all sorrow in the grave. You

have partially won it through constant and arduous labor, but for me there is no such resource. Only in the pursuit of fashion and frivolity can I hope to bury the memory of the past, and the thought of that wretched Josephine almost disgusts me with that resource."

At this allusion to his wife, Latour shuddered, and rising, abruptly said:

"It grows late, let us go down; by this time Zolande has prepared your chamber for you, and you can take possession of it. Never utter that name in my presence again, Claire. The sound of it is a horror to me. The remembrance of that last scene at Carlsbad will haunt me as a terrible nightmare as long as I live, but I would not have it recalled to me by word or sign from one I love, as I know I shall love you."

"I will never breathe her name, again, Armand. Thank you for the confidence you have given me, for it has taught me how worthy of affectionate reverence you are."

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING THINGS SETTLED.

THE brother and sister descended the winding stairs, and regained the more modern portion of the building.

A luxuriously appointed sleeping-room opened from the saloon, and the door was thrown back, revealing the unusual luxury of a carpet of a delicate white

ground, sprinkled over with bouquets of brilliant flowers. A carved table in the centre of the floor supported a lamp of antique fashion, in which burned perfumed oil. Beside it was a tray on which was fruit, wine, and light, crisp biscuit.

Lace curtains, richly embroidered, floated from the open windows, and in an alcove was a bed draped with snowy linen. A damask covered sofa was between the windows, and a carved armoire with oval mirrors set in the doors, occupied a recess similar to that in which the bed stood. A dressing-stand, and several lounging chairs of different shapes completed the furnishing of this charming apartment. Latour led his sister forward, and said :

“ This is yours as long as you choose to occupy it, Claire. It communicates with the smoking room, and to-morrow, if you wish it, that shall be converted into a boudoir for the reception of such visitors as you may wish to receive.”

“ Dear brother, you are too good. How shall I ever repay you for what you are so ready to do for me? I cannot consent to turn you out of your own sanctum.”

“ I prefer the tower room to any in the house, and I seldom remain long in any other when I am here. As to repaying, Claire, it is I who must do that to you. I have transferred to you the heavy debt I owed my father, which should so long ago have been settled. Only love me a little, my sister; that is all the return I shall ask. Let me make your path bright and easy to travel, and I shall feel as if the toil of my life had not been in vain. My wealth, beyond the leisure it affords me to follow my own pursuits, and the power it gives me to aid others, is of little value to me. In the

excitement of accumulating it, I could bury the past, but once won, I found it powerless to purchase forgetfulness or happiness. Accept all I may lavish on you as your right, and say nothing of gratitude. I do not care to receive any other return than to see you enjoy the luxury it will be my greatest pleasure to afford you."

Claire threw herself upon his breast, and, for the first time, caressed him fondly. Latour gravely returned the kisses she lavished on him, and smiling faintly, said:

"It is so long since a woman's arms encircled my neck, that I scarcely know how to comport myself under such novel circumstances. Here is wine; let me drink to you, my fair chatelaine, with the hope that here you will find peace and perfect content."

He filled two small goblets with the clear, sparkling liquid, and gracefully offering one to Claire, clinked the edge of his own against it.

"If I do not, it will be my own fault," cried Claire, "I am not fond of wine, but I will drink this in honor of the gentle and true heart that prompted your words."

When they had replaced the goblets, Latour said:

"I will send Zolande to you to act as your attendant, but to-morrow I will see that a more suitable maid is provided for you. You must sleep sweetly to-night, for at an early hour of the morning we must go together to Mrs. Courtnay, and let her see that you have fallen into better hands than either she or you hoped."

"Yes, I shall sleep, I know, although I have passed through so much excitement in the last hours. Fate is kind to send me so charming a home, just as the one

I have lately shared must have been closed to me. Good night, brother ; put aside all sad memories, and welcome the new era that dawns for us both from this hour."

"I will make an effort to do so, Claire. Dream pleasant dreams, my fair sister, and feel assured that if it is within the compass of my ability to realize them, I will do so."

"Thanks. I believe you will prove better than a fairy-godmother to me," was the laughing rejoinder, and Latour left the room.

Zolande presently came in full of curiosity as to the past life of her young mistress, but Claire was not disposed to gratify it. She briefly gave such facts as it was well for her brother's household to know, and dismissed the inquisitive old woman as soon as possible, that she might think over alone the strange events of the afternoon.

She felt toward her brother as if she had known him all her life, for his resemblance to her father was so great that it took all sense of strangeness from him. Claire deeply regretted that those two should have so misunderstood each other, and she sighed as she thought it was the same spirit of retaliation which ruled herself that had so long kept them apart. Bitter and resentful natures they all had, then why should she be held accountable for the tenacity with which she cherished her own scheme of retribution ? was the question she asked herself.

Claire gazed long and earnestly upon the image reflected in the large mirror before which she sat, wondering if that brilliant face could ever fade ; that gay youthfulness of aspect lose its charm, for it seems very

difficult to the young to realize that the passage of a few fleeting years must rob them of that which is so precious to themselves, so attractive to others.

A bright smile gradually crept over the sober thoughtfulness of her face, as she observed for the first time the quaint night-robcs in which Zolande had dressed her. As she had none of her own with her, the old woman had drawn on her own stores, and a short full gown, made of some striped material of brilliant colors, and a stiffly-starched cap with a high crown, made her look like a young French peasant.

Claire laughed as she threw aside the latter, hurriedly said over her prayers, and sprang into the elastic bed. Physically worn out with the excitement through which she had passed, she fell almost immediately into a deep sleep, which lasted till long after the sun had risen.

At eight o'clock Zolande came in to see if she was awake, and offered her services to assist at her toilette. But Claire desired her to return to her household duties, declaring that she needed no attendant and was accustomed to wait upon herself.

When she entered the breakfast room she found her brother waiting to receive her, and after the morning salutations he said :

"I am glad to have tangible evidence that all that passed last night was not a dream. Away from you, Claire, I find it difficult to realize that I have a charming sister, young enough to be my daughter, who will give an interest to my lonely life which it long has wanted."

Claire smilingly replied :

"I am glad that you like me, Armand. I intend to

render myself necessary to you in the future, and I think we can be very happy together."

Zolande came in, bringing her waiter, and an exquisite little breakfast was soon served in a style of luxury with which the young chatelaine was enchanted. Fresh flowers adorned the table, and most tempting fruits in silver baskets lined with fresh leaves and moss, were placed among the more substantial edibles. Coffee of most delicious aroma was poured into porcelain cups, and Claire sipped hers, declaring it was far better than nectar: delicate French rolls and rice cakes, with game, perfectly prepared, completed the repast.

"I declare, brother, you are a perfect sybarite," she laughingly declared, as she arose from the table. "Who would have expected to find such a *menage* in this dilapidated looking tower?"

I believe I understand comfort, a thing the English declare peculiar to themselves," said Latour. "I sojourned long enough in *perfid*e Albion, as my countrymen are fond of calling it, to learn something from its people, which I have since turned to advantage. Latour is almost a ruin, as you say, but now that I have somebody to plan and decorate for, I shall send workmen hither to renovate the old place, but that shall not be done till you take possession of my town house and queen it there. I have ordered the carriage, and we had better go in to visit Mrs. Courtnay as soon as possible. She must be uneasy about you, though I sent a note in to her last night explaining, as well as I could, what had happened to throw you under my protection in so unexpected a manner."

"That was very kind and thoughtful of you, Armand, and I thank you for it with all my heart. I can

be ready to set out in a few moments, and I am most impatient to present you to mamma, and tell her how much at home I feel with you already."

Claire went to her room, and in a few moments returned equipped for the drive.

A handsome English barouche was drawn up in front of the entrance, to which was harnessed a pair of magnificent bays; a footman in livery stood at their heads, while M. Latour handed in his sister, and placed himself beside her. He took the reins himself, and in a few moments they were whirling rapidly toward Paris.

The morning was deliciously clear and soft, and Claire found her brother a most agreeable companion. In less than an hour she found herself at Mrs. Court-nay's lodgings, and Julia came flying to the door to welcome her, exclaiming:

"I have been watching for you all the morning. Oh! Claire, how could you stay away all night? Mamma had a long talk with Andrew when he came back without you, but she told me nothing but that you had found your brother."

"Andrew is here, then," said Claire, glad to find that he had performed his promise to return and explain to his mother what had occurred.

"Yes—he is here, but I have not seen him. He has shut himself up in his room, and will not let me in. This is M. Latour, I suppose. He is very nice-looking, but I shan't like him if he takes you away from us."

With his winning smile Latour held out his hand to the little girl, and said:

"I mean to make you like me, *petite*, even if I do rob you of your friend, Claire. She belongs to me, you

know, but I do not intend to ask her to give up her old loves entirely. You and your mother shall come to me and we will have a good time together before we talk of parting."

With the frank confidence of childhood, Julia gave him her hand, and led him toward the reception room, but he contrived to detain her a few moments on the way, while Claire flitted past them and sought Mrs. Courtnay.

She found her looking extremely pale, but perfectly composed after the severe trial through which she had passed.

She faintly said:

"Thank Heaven, you are safe, my child! but I tremble to think what the result might have been if that madman had carried out his treacherous plans. He came back to me, told me all, and implored my forgiveness. But oh, Claire, it was a terrible blow to me to discover that he had so long and systematically deceived me."

"Think no more of it, dearest mamma. Andrew knows now that, under no possible contingency, would I become his wife, and that will work a complete cure sooner than anything else. It was most fortunate that he did not know to whose grounds the cottage he took me to belonged, or I might have been compelled to go with him on the tour he had planned. But even in that case I should have brought him back to you before very long, with his illusion dispelled, and ready to let me go on my own terms."

Mrs. Courtnay sighed heavily.

"I think he understands, at last, that there can be no hope for him. I shall get him back to Virginia

as soon as possible ; it is the best thing I can do to remove him as far as possible from you. But where is M. Latour ? He came in with you I suppose ? ”

“ Yes ; he lingered in the hall with Julia a few moments, to allow me to speak with you before presenting himself. Oh, mamma, Armand is good and noble, and it was most unfortunate that he and my father did not better understand each other. He has explained all that to me entirely to my satisfaction : you will like him, and do justice to him when you know him, I am sure.”

The door was thrown open, and M. Latour entered, followed by Julia. He advanced and took the extended hand of Mrs. Courtnay with a grace and *empressement* of manner that impressed her very favorably. He bowed deferentially, as he said :

“ I do not require an introduction to the friend of my father and the maternal protectress of my sister. Mrs. Courtnay, I can never sufficiently thank you for all your past kindness to those I would gladly have aided myself, if I had been permitted to do so.”

“ Now that I see you face to face, M. Latour, I cannot doubt that,” she replied. “ You are so strikingly like your father in person, that I feel assured you must possess the same honorable traits of mind and heart. Claire tells me that all has been explained between you, and I accept her assurance that all is as it should be. You owe me nothing, I assure you ; for the assistance your father rendered me in many ways, after my husband’s death, more than repaid me for the little he would accept at my hands. To care for *his* child as he had cared for mine was a sacred duty which I have found much pleasure in fulfilling. If that had not

been so, the service you rendered me yesterday afternoon, in saving my son from an act which he must bitterly have repented, would more than repay me for all I have done."

"It was fortunate that I returned home just at this crisis," Latour briefly replied; "so let us say no more on that painful subject."

"I received your note last night, and I was pleased with the thoughtful kindness which induced you to send it. I was not quite reassured concerning Claire till I read it, for Andrew was not in a condition to give a very clear account of what had taken place. He is, however, calmer this morning, and I hope, in a fair way to regain his sober senses."

"I am glad to hear that. It was a youthful folly, which must be forgiven in consideration of the temptation constantly before Mr. Courtnay. I will in future relieve you from all care on my sister's account, by taking her under my own protection, and thus remove her from the vicinity of your son. Absence will soon complete his cure, for a man rarely clings to one who showed such anxiety to escape from him, as Claire did yesterday evening, when I came upon them in so unexpected a manner."

Julia drew near to Claire, and anxiously whispered:

"What did Andrew do? I think I ought to know too."

"Well, pet, if you will be very prudent and say nothing about it, I will tell you," replied Claire, in the same tone.

"I declare I'll never say one word, but I'm dying to know all about it."

"It would be a pity to let you die, so I will tell you that Andrew wanted me to marry him—that was all."

“Well, why wouldn’t you? I’m sure I would rather have you for my sister than Cousin Emma. Besides, I heard somebody say that cousins ought not to marry.”

“But your brother is engaged to Emma, and he must keep his pledges. She is only a distant cousin, and not so near related as to make the match objectionable. *I* can’t marry him, because I do not love him well enough.”

“I think you might, when you know how much we all think of you. But I suppose you had rather stay here with that fine brother of yours, and have everything your own way. Andrew wouldn’t let you have *that*, for he makes *me* do just as *he* pleases.”

While this whispered colloquy was carried on, Mrs. Courtnay and her guest were engaged in earnest conversation, on which Claire was unwilling to intrude, so she lured Julia to a distant window and watched the passers-by till her brother recalled her to his side.

M. Latour then said :

“I have been urging Mrs. Courtnay to give up her lodgings in town and spend the remainder of her time in France at Latour with us. She tells me that her son intends to set out for Baden this evening, to spend the rest of the season there. Under those circumstances, I can see no reason why she shall not be our guest. Join your entreaties with mine, Claire, to induce her to consent.”

Claire turned eagerly to her friend, and exclaimed :

“Dear mamma, when you know how happy such a visit will make me, I know you will come. My brother could have thought of nothing that will afford me so much pleasure as to have you and Julia with me

in my own home. You cannot say no, for I feel that I have the *right* to claim you."

With a smile, Mrs. Courtnay replied :

"You have no cause to urge your claims so vehemently, my dear, for I shall be as happy to see you in your new sphere as you can be to have me with you. But Julia's masters attend her daily, and in the brief time I shall remain, I wish her to profit by their instructions as much as possible. How then can I remove to the country?"

"Latour is but a few miles from the city, and I will promise to bring Mademoiselle Julia in every day to my town house to receive her masters," said Latour. "It is really too warm to linger in Paris at this season of the year, and if I were permitted to offer my advice, I should say that fresh air and exercise will be better for your daughter, madam, than confinement to study. She has time enough before her, without burdening her with accomplishments just now."

Julia grasped his hand, and warmly pressed it.

"What a dear, good man you are, M. Latour, to petition for freedom for me a little while. I am dying for a romp upon the grass and a good run under the trees. You don't know what a weary wilderness of brick and mortar this great city is to me. I go to the boulevards and parks, but they are filled with people, and they are not like the country I have been used to. Oh, mamma, if you will only let me put books aside for the next few weeks, and stay with Claire, I shall be the happiest girl alive."

"Do you really feel as if you need relaxation, Julia? You have not complained of being overtaxed, or I should have permitted you to lay aside your studies

during the warm weather. Anxious as I am for your improvement, your health is of far more importance to me."

Julia laughed gleefully.

"I am not going to be ill, mamma, so have no fears on my account. I am only tired and stupid; the holiday M. Latour proposes to give me will quite set me up, and give me new energy to pursue my studies when I commence them again. I know that you cannot stay here after Claire and Andrew have both left us, with nobody but me for a companion; so be a dear, sweet mother, and say yes at once."

Mrs. Courtnay smiled, and said:

"With three against me, of course there is no alternative but to yield as gracefully as possible. I accept your invitation very willingly, I assure you, M. Latour; before I leave my adopted child, I wish to see her settled in her new home, and become well acquainted with the protector to whose care I must surrender her."

"Thank you, dear madam, for so kindly acceding to my request. I will now leave my sister with you a few hours, while I call at the banking house and attend to some other business that claims my care. During my long absence my town residence has been closed, but now that I have a fair mistress to preside over it, I must give orders to have it thoroughly refitted in a style of elegance commensurate with the importance to me of the lady who is to reign over it. If I can induce you to spend the coming winter with Claire, I shall be very glad, for she is too young and attractive to be launched in the gay world without a maternal adviser near her."

Mrs. Courtnay shook her head.

"I scarcely think that I can delay my departure so long, deeply as I am interested in Claire's future."

"We will leave the question open for future discussion," said Latour, bowing over her hand, "and I will not despair of yet inducing you to prolong your residence in France. *Au revoir, madame.*"

"Return in time to take luncheon with us, monsieur, and then we can settle our plans."

"Thanks! I will do so, and reclaim my treasure-trove, for I cannot part from Claire so soon after finding her."

Latour left the room, and Mrs. Courtney turned to Claire, and said:

"Your brother is a sad-looking man, but a most interesting one, my dear. If, without violating confidence, you can explain to me the cause of his estrangement from your father, I shall be glad to know it."

"I will tell you his painful story, mamma, for I think it but justice to Armand to do so. He did not prohibit me from repeating to you what he related to me, and I am sure he wishes you to understand that he was not entirely to blame. If my poor father would only have written to him, all could have been set right between them, but in this world people seldom understand each other."

"Come with me to my room, and do you go to the piano, Julia. Your music master will soon be here, and you must be ready to receive him."

Very reluctantly was this command obeyed, for Julia had the curiosity of a child of her years, and she was most eager to know all that could be told her of her new friend.

On entering her apartment, Mrs. Courtney said to her companion:

“Remain here a few moments, my dear, while I go to Andrew and tell him that you are here. He is most anxious to see you alone a few moments, that he may implore pardon for the outrage of which he has been guilty. I will return to you presently, and while you give me the history you have promised, Andrew can prepare himself for the interview I have guaranteed shall be granted him. You will not refuse this last request from my poor penitent boy, I hope?”

“No; I could refuse nothing asked of me by you, mamma, and I wish to see Andrew once more before we finally part. Say as much to him from me, if you please.”

Mrs. Courtnay crossed the hall, and entered the apartment of her son. Andrew was lying back in a large fauteuil, looking as wan as if he had passed through a violent fit of illness. Dark circles were around his eyes, and an expression of languor pervaded his whole person.

Courtnay had passed through a terrible night, and he felt utterly subdued by the struggle—which, to him, had been darker than the passage from life to death. He understood, for the first time, how impossible it was for Claire ever to be more to him than she now was; he felt that he had sinned against her almost beyond forgiveness, and he had nothing to plead in his own defence but the overwhelming passion with which she had inspired him. Yet he could not leave without seeing her once more, and saying in person what he had resolved should be spoken before they parted, perhaps, forever. He meant to atone in some way for the violence of which he had been guilty, and in time, at least, reclaim the respect of the idol he so madly worshipped.

Andrew listlessly looked up when his mother entered, and asked :

“Have you concluded that it will be best for me to go away at once, mother? I *cannot* stay here. If I do, you will be forced to place me in a lunatic asylum before many days are over.”

His mother sat down by him, and taking his passive hand in hers, gently said :

“I have maturely considered all you said to me last night, my son, and reluctant as I am to part from you just now, I have concluded that it will be best to seek diversion to your thoughts in new scenes. Yet I scarcely think Baden a safe place for you to visit in your present frame of mind. To a young man like yourself there are many temptations to be found there.”

“I know what you refer to, mother, but the gaming table offers no attractions to me. If I resort to it, it will only be for the purpose of watching the play of others without taking part in it myself. You may trust me that far, I assure you. I am not reckless, as you may imagine from what has lately taken place. I threw my all upon a single chance in the game I have played, and lost, and all others seem stale and flat beside it. I have reflected deeply in the last few hours; and I am no longer a dreaming boy, but a man of strong impulse and resolute will. I know how fondly your heart is set on me, and I pledge you my honor that henceforth I will be a dutiful son and strive to be faithful to the responsibilities laid on me by the position I occupy in life. Never again shall you have cause to blush for me.”

Mrs. Courtnay tenderly embraced him, kissed his pale brow, and said :

“I can and will trust you, Andrew, for, until this temptation assailed you, you were never guilty of a falsehood in your life. It has been said that such a disappointment as you have met with gives strength and development to a man’s mind, and in your case I trust it may prove true. I shall look to your future career, Andrew, to compensate me for the uneasiness you have made me suffer on your account, and I feel sure that now this delusion is ended, your course will be upward and onward in the career I wish you to pursue.”

The listener sighed wearily, but he firmly replied :

“It shall be, I pledge you my word, mother. In the rewards won by ambitious striving, I may regain the peace and self-respect I have lost, and I will labor to attain them. I comprehend now, though in my blind selfishness I did not before, how terrible was the fate to which I would have chained Claire in compelling her to become mine against her will. Have you heard from her yet?”

“I came hither to tell you that she is here. M. Latour has also called, but he has gone out into the city, leaving Claire with me for a few hours. He insists that Julia and I shall spend some time at his chateau, and as you will leave for Baden, I accepted his invitation. He seems a clever and amiable man.”

After a pause, Andrew said :

“Of course you could not refuse when he asked you to visit Claire. It will be pleasanter for you there than in the city at this season, and—and I wish you to study M. Latour and judge if he is worthy to assume the charge of his sister. She must always be an

object of deep interest to me, although she will not consent to love me."

"I shall do so for my own satisfaction, you may be sure. He has convinced Claire that he was not entirely to blame in his course toward his father, and she has promised to explain to me as much as is necessary to exonerate him. He resembles M. Lapierre so strongly, that it is difficult to believe he can be a mean or dishonorable man."

"I hope your judgment of him is correct, mother, for I should be most reluctant to see Claire surrendered to the protection of a man in whom entire confidence cannot be placed. Have you told her that I wish to see her once more?"

"Yes—and she has consented to grant you the interview; you will do or say nothing to make her regret this concession, I hope, Andrew."

He laid his hand on hers and said:

"Feel how cool my pulses are, and have no fears of violence now. I have exhausted that phase of my nature, I believe, in the bitter humiliation of the last eighteen hours. It is 'repentance that needeth not to be repented of,' I am sure. I have deeply sinned against her, but for your sake Claire will accord me her forgiveness. In half an hour I will go to the salon; you can send her to me there, and leave us alone a few moments; all I have to say can soon be spoken."

"I will do so, and now I will leave you to compose yourself for the meeting."

"Yes—and the parting, for it will be our last encounter on earth."

Mrs. Courtnay went out of the room, and closed the door behind her with a feeling of thankfulness that

her son was restored to her, even through such sharp discipline as he had borne.

When she rejoined Claire, the latter gave her an outline of the story her brother had related to her, to which her friend listened with the deepest interest. At its close she said :

“It was most unfortunate that your father broke off all communication with his native land, or he must have heard of the efforts made by M. Latour to retrieve his family name and honor. What you have told me proves to me that your brother is as high-toned a man as his father was, and I no longer fear to leave you under his guardianship. I was very agreeably impressed with his appearance and manners, and I believe if you do not perversely mar your own fate, it may be a very happy one.”

“I thank you, mamma, in Armand’s name for your estimate of him ; as to myself, the least said the better. I intend to be a brilliant star in the new firmament in which I am going to shine, and if I can find happiness in gayety and excitement I may try to forget the blight that has fallen on me ; but I promise nothing. I believe that my destiny is written, and I cannot change it.”

“‘We make our own path and throw our own shadow on it,’ has truly been said,” replied Mrs. Courtnay. “But as you told me once before, Claire, preaching is useless. I will leave you to the influence of a good man who will give you so much to be thankful for, that the root of bitterness will be extracted from your heart, and in time the fatal fantasy that now darkens your mind, be laid aside. By this time Andrew is awaiting you in the salon. Be gentle and forgiving

with him, Claire, for he has suffered deeply in the last few hours, and he is thoroughly penitent for the violence of his conduct."

Claire arose at once and said :

"I will go to him, and tell him how heartily I forgive him, since I was rescued from him in time to evade the terrible fate he was preparing for both him and myself."

She left the room, but paused a few moments in the hall to steady her nerves for the meeting which she wished to have over as soon as possible.

When Claire at last summoned courage to enter the apartment in which Courtnay awaited her, she quickly opened the door and went in. He was pacing the floor with agitated steps, but when the object of his tumultuous thoughts stood before him, Andrew seemed suddenly to regain his self-control. He calmly took her hand and led her to a sofa, taking a seat beside, but not near her. After a slight pause he said :

"I most earnestly wished to see you once more, Claire, to say to you how bitterly I regret the attempt of last evening. I believed that I could reconcile you to our enforced marriage, and make you far happier as my cherished wife than you can ever be in the pursuit of an *ignis fatuus* that must wreck your life if you do not relinquish it. Your words to me in the cottage convinced me too late of my error. What passed between us there proved to me that such affection as you have for me is not that which I coveted, and from that moment I saw how fatally I had deluded myself. I gave you up then utterly and forever. I no longer regret that my mad attempt was frustrated. I can only be thankful that such was the result, for I

should only have given you new cause of wretchedness and myself the deepest remorse, when I had bound you to myself and knew, as I now know, that you can never love me. Pardon me, and forget the violence of which I was guilty, though it will be long before I shall obtain my own forgiveness."

"You have mine, Andrew," she gently replied. "Let us forget what is so disagreeable to remember, and be the friends we were before it happened. Since no evil resulted to me, you have no cause for self-condemnation; you only gave me an informal introduction to my brother, and enabled me to become better acquainted with him in a few hours, than I might have been under other circumstances, in as many months."

"You are very good, to take the affair so lightly, but I cannot so easily reconcile myself to the dishonor I have brought upon myself. I have loved you from boyhood, Claire, beyond anything on earth, but a fatal blow to my passion was struck by your words and manner to me yesterday afternoon. I merited the scorn that blazed from your eyes; the bitter words that came from your lips, but they brought me back to my senses. When I left you, I was tempted for a few moments to take my own life, but that would have been so cowardly—so cruel to the best of mothers, that I recoiled from it, and hurried hither where I felt I should be safe from myself.

"I made no attempt at concealment, but related as exactly as I could, what had occurred. Oh! Claire, my mother is a noble and true woman; she proved herself an angel of forbearance toward her wayward and reckless son. She saved me; she brought me back to the sense of my own responsibility as a human being,

and henceforth I shall live for her; to restore her confidence in me, no effort will be too great, and I have made up my mind to pursue the path she has marked out for me, without attempting to swerve from it.

“I shall leave Paris in a few more hours, in the hope that in new scenes I may recover the tranquility I have lost. When that is attained, I shall return to my native land, assume the duties of my station, and try to be a good and useful man.”

“Dear Andrew, how glad I am to hear you speak thus. You will marry, and be happier far with Emma than you would ever have been with me.”

With a faint attempt to smile, Courtnay said: “If Emma will consent to accept me, after knowing all that I shall feel bound to tell her, I will redeem my pledges to her; and I think I shall be a good husband to her if she consents to forgive me. The measure of my mother’s content will not be full, unless I bring her a daughter in place of the one she must leave behind her here, and to please her in every act of my life, will henceforth be my aim. I have buried my selfishness, my irritable hardness, in the grave in which I laid my passion for you. That much, at least, has been gained by the anguish through which I have struggled, and won the victory over myself at last.”

Claire impulsively exclaimed:

“Oh! Andrew, if I had known—if I had understood the depth of your attachment to me, I could have shown you how different were my feelings for you, and thus have saved you from this sorrow. But for years past I have deluded myself with the belief that you had ceased to care for me, except as for a

tenderly beloved sister. I am most unfortunate to have inspired true love where I cannot return it; to have given it where it was not appreciated."

He sadly said:

"It is the history of life. We live at cross purposes forever, but in the future existence promised us, I suppose these things will all be set right. And now, in conclusion, Claire, let me say that if I can ever atone to you in any way for the outrage of which I have been guilty, I will endeavor to do so. I will serve you in every possible way, and if you should ever need a friend, do not hesitate to call on me as if I were indeed your brother."

Claire raised her beautiful eyes to his face suffused with tears, and offering him her hand, said:

"I promise to do so, Andrew, if I should be placed in such a position. In this painful hour, the true nobility of your nature shines forth, and I appreciate you as I never did before. If it should ever be in your power to serve me by assisting me to attain what, you are aware, I have set my heart on, I will give you the warmest gratitude I am capable of feeling. I cannot give up the purpose to which I have vowed to dedicate my life; help me to accomplish it and you will more than atone for your late conduct to me. Fate may place that power in your hands; if it should, use it for my benefit. I do not think that I could rest in my grave, if I had not been acknowledged as Walter Thorne's lawful wife before I was laid in it."

Courtnay sighed heavily, and bitterly said:

"Your madness is almost equal to my own, Claire, but I shall remember your words, and if the opportunity offers without being sought by me, I will do what I

can to serve you in your own way. And now, let us part forever. In all probability this is our last meeting on earth, and for me, it is better that it should be so."

Andrew still held the hand she had placed in his, and before she was aware of his purpose, he drew her to his breast and kissed her fervently on the lips and brow. Then suddenly releasing her, he sunk back, and faintly said :

"Go now, while I have firmness to see you depart from my sight, never to be looked on again."

"Adieu, Andrew," she tearfully cried. "May Heaven bless you, and give you strength to bear the burden I have most unwittingly laid upon you."

In another moment Courtnay was alone, and after a few moments of bitter struggle, he arose and sought the solitude of his own apartment.

Late in the evening he set out on his proposed tour, looking pale, but quite composed, and the gentle firmness of his manner when he bade his mother farewell, gave her the assurance that he had gained strength to subdue his unfortunate passion, and that in time, he would return to her restored to himself.

M. Latour returned to luncheon, and it was arranged that Claire should come in on the following morning for Mrs. Courtnay and her daughter, and take them to the chateau to remain there till the time for their departure for the United States drew near.

CHAPTER VII.

A YOUNG CIRCE.

LATE in the evening, Claire drove back to Latour with her brother, rather subdued in spirits, for the parting with Andrew had deeply affected her. She felt the deepest compassion for him, for she too well understood what baffled love was, not to give her hearty sympathy to him who had so nobly confessed his wrong, and struggled to regain the control of himself.

Claire informed her brother of what she had told Mrs. Courtnay, and he said in reply :

“It was necessary to explain to her that I am not the hard-hearted wretch she may have supposed me, and you did right, Claire ; but if it had been possible to avoid throwing blame on my poor, mistaken father, I should have been very glad. Henceforth, let us bury the whole story in oblivion, and when we refer to him let it be with the tender reverence due to the dead who once made a part of our lives.”

When the carriage approached the lodge, Antoine and his dumb wife both came out to the gate, and the woman caught the dress of Claire and carried it to her lips, gesticulating her expressive pantomime, while her husband humbly said :

“She is thanking you, mademoiselle, for obtaining pardon for us from the seigneur. We can never be grateful enough to you for preventing us from being turned out on the world for our wrong-doing.”

Before Claire could reply, her brother sternly said :

“ You richly merited such a punishment, and but for the intercession of my sister, it would have fallen on you. I shall keep a sharp eye on you in the future, and if I detect the slightest evidence of want of faith, you shall go at a moment’s warning. Remember that, for I do not keep those about me that I cannot trust.”

He made a sign to the woman to loosen her hold on Claire’s robe, and swept through the gate so rapidly as to forbid reply. She deprecatingly said :

“ Do not be too hard on them, Armand. They are very poor, and the large sum offered them was a great temptation. I have forgiven the greatest delinquent, and you can pardon the humble instruments employed by him.”

“ I have done so, because I could not refuse the first request you made of me ; but through life it has been my rule to refuse confidence to those who have once deceived me. Antoine has proved that he is destitute of principle, and I shall never have confidence in him again. Did you see young Courtnay to-day ? ”

“ Yes—I have taken a final leave of him. Andrew has relinquished all hope of ever being more to me than he now is, and I think he will return to Virginia, and marry the young girl his mother wishes to become his wife.”

Latour drily said :

“ I am glad to hear that he will try to please his mother, since he has lost all chance of pleasing himself. How could he hope to win you, since your husband is still living ? ”

“ As I am divorced, Andrew believed that I would respect the tie he intended to force upon me ; but I would not have done so. I was married with all the

forms of the Church, and no merely legal tribunal could free me from my bonds."

"Then an ecclesiastical one shall. You must not remain bound in any way to the man who so basely treated you. If I have to apply to the Pope himself, you shall be released."

"But I do not wish it, Armand. Let me appear in society as a widow; no one here has the right to inquire into my past history, and nothing shall induce me to give my hand to any other than Walter Thorne. I have suffered enough through him, to make me willing to abjure the whole sex as far as marriage is concerned."

"Are you really in earnest, Claire?"

"Solemnly in earnest, I do assure you. I consider myself free to flirt as much as I please, and wider freedom than that I neither wish, nor would accept."

"So much the better for me," Latour replied, with a gay laugh. "I was beginning to fear that I should not long be allowed to retain the waif my good fortune has so unexpectedly sent me, but if you adhere to your views, no one can take you from me."

"No one shall, brother. I intend to devote my life to you, and we will console each other for our mutual misfortunes in affairs of the heart. Life affords a great deal of enjoyment aside from love's young dream, and it is well that we have both awakened from its delusion."

A heavy sigh escaped from Latour's lips, and he softly said:

"Yet the dream was very sweet while it lasted. I admit that it was not worth the anguish with which a few brief days of bliss were purchased, but neither

you nor I would give up the memory of those hours of enchantment in which we believed that we were beloved, even as we loved."

They drove on a short distance in silence. Suddenly Latour said :

"Look, Claire, how do you like my improvements?"

A turn in the avenue brought them in sight of the grounds immediately around the chateau, and the young girl uttered an exclamation of delighted surprise at the transformation which had been accomplished.

In the few hours of her absence a most agreeable change had been wrought in the appearance of the desolate and long-neglected lawn. A small army of workmen had been employed to clear away the rank undergrowth, prune the trees, and clean the mould from the statues.

The water nymph had resumed her place, the choked bed of the fountain was cleaned out and replenished with water, through which darted gold and silver fish. The shrubbery had been trimmed, and every unsightly object removed.

Claire exclaimed:

"This is like magic. I left the place a few hours ago an unsightly wilderness, and I find it now a beautiful and well-ordered pleasure ground. How could such a metamorphosis have been completed in so short a time?"

"It is the magic of money, that is all, my dear. I issued my orders before I left the chateau this morning, and Pierre has had them carried into effect. Let us go into the house and see what has been done within doors to render Latour worthy to receive our guests."

By this time they were at the entrance, and Claire alighted from the carriage and followed her brother, wondering what new surprise awaited her in the house.

Latour led her to the room he had said would make a pleasant boudoir, and she found that all his arms and pipes had been removed to make way for a piano and harp. Stands filled with music occupied the corners, and books elegantly bound and illustrated, lay upon inlaid tables. The smoothly waxed floor was covered with a tapestry carpet of delicate colors, and Latour laughingly said as he pointed to it:

“That was ordered in compliment to your transatlantic rearing. I know that your countrymen consider the furnishing of a room incomplete if the floor is not covered. I hope you like my improvements, mademoiselle?”

“Like them! Indeed I do. I can never do enough to show you how highly I appreciate your kindness.”

“Only love me, and cling to me as your good providence, that is all the return I ask. Come now, and I will show you the suite of apartments I have had prepared for your friend.”

He led her through the vestibule, and opened a door which gave into a large, well-lighted chamber elegantly fitted up. From this a smaller one opened, and beyond was a bath-room.

“These are for Mrs. Courtnay and her daughter, and I hope we shall be able to make them so well contented here, that they will consent to linger a long time with us.”

“They would be hard to please if they were not contented with such a host as you to cater for them. Mamma will be delighted, and Julia will be happy as

the fairies. But neither of them can appreciate this as I do, Armand, for you have done it to make me happy."

"Well, *pétite*, if the end is gained, I am repaid."

Claire threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him many times. She said:

"I have found one good man, at all events, and, for his sake, I will hereafter think better of his false sex."

"But not so well of any one among them, I hope, as to make you wish for the divorce I spoke of," he replied laughing. "I intend to keep you for myself alone; and, if I can, I will make your life as bright as a fairy tale. But it grows late, and supper will soon be served. You had better go to your chamber and take off your bonnet."

It was already dusk, and when Claire entered her room, she found wax lights burning on the toilette, and a neat-looking young girl waiting to receive her. She smiled, courtsied, and said:

"I am mademoiselle's maid, and my name is Finette. I am old Pierre's grand-daughter, but I have been trained for a lady's maid in a school in Paris, to which Monsieur le Baron sent me."

Her new mistress smilingly said:

"You are a nice-looking girl, Finette, and I like your face. I think we shall get along very well together; and it was kind of my brother to provide a maid for me."

"M. Latour thinks of everything, mademoiselle; he is the best and kindest of gentlemen. What dress shall I lay out for you, my lady? I have arranged your wardrobe, and have everything ready for your toilette."

Finette threw open the armoire, and Claire saw that the dresses which had lately been made for her were all there; and she knew that her brother had been thoughtful enough to have her trunks sent out before her own arrival. She gayly said:

“Really, this must be an enchanted palace, and my brother the spirit that rules. Since he has troubled himself to have my things sent out, I must pay him the compliment to dress for the evening. Take down the lavender silk with cherry trimmings; that will be most becoming to my style, and I wish to look as well as possible in his eyes.”

Finette obeyed; she then removed her young lady's hat, enclosed her in a dressing robe, and proceeded to let down the shining lengths of her hair, uttering exclamations of delight at its softness and lustre.

The maid deftly performed her duties, and Claire stood before the long mirror in full evening dress for the first time in her life. Her robe was cut low on the bosom, with short sleeves, and over both arms and bodice was a fall of fine lace, fastened with knots of cherry-colored ribbon, which relieved the delicate shade of the dress, and harmonized with her creamy complexion and dark eyes.

She blushed and smiled at the radiant image of youth and beauty that gleamed on her from the mirror, and wondered what her recreant husband would think and feel if he could see her now, in the perfect development of her charms, surrounded by a degree of luxury to which he had not himself been accustomed.

Her lip curled with disdainful pride as she thought of him, and mentally said:

“All this is but a stepping-stone to the fixed pur-

pose of my life. I shall reach him yet. I will reach him, or die in the attempt."

Finette interrupted her thoughts, by asking ;

"Will mademoiselle wear no jewels ? Her toilette is incomplete without them."

"I have none," said Claire, dreamily. "It does not matter about them for this evening."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, but these were sent in just before you came. I laid them in the drawer, for they are so beautiful I could not help looking at them, and I was afraid I might make some blunder in your toilette if they were left on the table."

"A new surprise from Armand, I suppose," thought the elated Claire, for she had a passion for gems, which she had never been able to indulge ; and she drew out the drawer herself. A cry of delight issued from her lips as she beheld the magnificent present awaiting her acceptance.

An open casket lay within, containing a parure of diamonds of dazzling lustre and beauty. An open paper lay beside them, on which was written in English :

"These belonged to my mother. They have long lain unused ; a part of the time in pledge for the debts I have since liquidated. Wear them this evening for my gratification, Claire, for I wish to see my young chatelaine decked in the symbols of her new rank. It is an idle fancy, perhaps, but it will please me to see these gems glittering upon the person of one who is worthy to wear them."

Claire lifted the different pieces from their velvet bed, and with ecstasy she made no attempt to conceal, saw the brilliant jewels flash from throat, breast and

arms, as Finette fastened them in their places. There was also a bandeau for the hair, with a large star upon the forehead. She laughingly said :

“They are not suited to this dress, but I must wear them this evening to please their munificent donor.”

“There are two other sets, if mademoiselle prefers to wear them,” said the maid, diving deeper into the drawer, and bringing forth a couple of morocco cases, in one of which was a parure of pink coral, and in the other one of pearls.

“Really, my brother is too profuse in his liberality,” murmured Claire. “He means to take my heart by storm ; but the best part of it was his before he attempted to buy it with these beautiful things.”

“The coral ornaments will suit your toilette best, mademoiselle,” said Finette. “Shall I remove the diamonds and put these in their place ?”

“By no means ; my brother wishes me to wear my diamonds to-night, so you can put up the others.”

“You are right, mademoiselle ; you look magnificent, superb ! You are the queen of beautiful women.”

Claire smiled at this flattery, and swept out of the room. She found her brother in the salon in which the supper-table was laid. She flashed suddenly upon him in all her bravery, and he looked first surprised, then delighted. Latour involuntarily exclaimed :

“Good Heavens ! how beautiful you are, Claire ! I thought you lovely in your plain gray robe, but in full toilette you are enchanting. Your eyes rival your diamonds in brilliancy, my dear, and your cheeks have a lovelier coloring than your ribbons. The man that wrote that nonsense about beauty unadorned must have been a curmudgeon.”

“I fully agree with you in that opinion,” she gayly replied. “But the light of my eyes is not borrowed from the shimmer of my jewels, Armand. It is born of the glowing gratitude of my heart for your boundless munificence to me. I, so poor all my life, so lately dependent, feel as if I have been suddenly transformed into a princess, as poor Cinderella was. But I know my gems will not turn into pebble-stones, as her carriage did to a pumpkin; and my prince is something far better than hers, for he is my dear brother, and cannot ask of me the reward Cinder’s lover demanded.”

“I shall ask as much love as he did, though of a different kind,” was the smiling response. “I cannot give you a glass slipper, because I am not a fairy godfather, but anything in reason you may ask and have. But here comes our supper, and Zolande seems struck dumb by the splendor of your appearance.”

The old woman placed the dishes upon the table, and then, with a deep courtesy to the brilliant figure before her, said :

“You are served, my lady. You are wearing the diamonds of my mistress, I see, and well do they become you, too. Ah! many is the day since they shone in the light before.”

“Don’t go to crooning over past days, Zolande, but welcome the new era that has dawned for us all. How is it that you are waiting on the table, when I ordered a butler to be sent from Paris?”

The housekeeper drew herself up, and said, with extreme dignity :

“The creature is here, M. Armand, but I wasn’t going to let him wait on you, when I have done it to

your satisfaction so long. Besides, he's got a misery in him somewhere, and he's lying down."

Latour frowned, and then laughed, as he said :

"I hope you did not attempt to scratch his face for intruding here ; it would be just like you if you had. I am going to keep open house, and entertain like other proprietors, and you must submit to have your dominions invaded. You shall be housekeeper, but a corps of properly trained servants will be installed here to-morrow, and it will be your business to keep them in good order."

The old woman looked aghast at this announcement.

"How on earth shall I ever do it ?" she dolefully asked.

"I should not think you would have any doubt as to your capacity to rule servants, when you have spent so many years of your life in trying to rule me."

"Oh, that was different," she briskly replied. "I nursed you and made you mind when you were a little fellow, and of course I expected to have something to say to you when you got to be a man."

Latour laughed good-humoredly.

"Well, I have no doubts myself as to your power to keep my people straight. If you find the charge too heavy for you, I can pension you off, and put a younger woman in authority."

Zolande tossed her high cap disdainfully.

"I was born on this place, and I have had charge of the house long enough to know what is to be done, even if we are to have strange people coming, so you need not talk of paying me to give up my place. I'll keep it even if the new servants torment me to death."

"So much the better; but there is much more danger of such a result to them than to you, I think."

The old woman deigned no reply to this insinuation; she waited most assiduously upon the two, affirming that the new butler was too much indisposed to make his appearance that evening.

When the repast was over, Latour led Claire into the music room, and asked her to play for him. She had become a brilliant performer on both harp and piano, and she asked him which he preferred.

"The harp of course," he said, "for that will display not only your proficiency as a musician, but show to advantage the grace, and beauty of your person. For the little while I have you to myself, I wish to enjoy all your powers of enchantment."

"You flatter charmingly," responded Claire, with a gay laugh. "I shall do my best to entrance you, but you must not expect to hear me sing like a prima donna. My voice has been thoroughly trained, but it is not one of great compass."

"It will please me all the better for that. I like music that speaks to the soul, and fashionable shrieking rarely has that power. Give me something soft and thrilling."

She placed herself beside the magnificent harp, swept the strings with skillful fingers, and after playing a prelude, struck into an old melody which she had learned from her father.

Latour listened a few moments, then threw himself upon the divan, and buried his face in the cushions. He presently looked up, and in a pained voice, said:

"Not that strain, Claire. It carries me back to my youth, and evokes too many painful memories. My

father played it on his violin, and it is the first tune I can remember. He was master of the instrument, as you know, and could have retrieved his broken fortunes as a musician if he would have consented to adopt such a calling."

"I have his violin," said Claire, "and he taught me to play upon it, too. Would you like to hear the old cremona again?"

"Above all things. The sight and sound of it would bring him more vividly before me than anything else could."

Claire left the room, and after a brief absence returned, bearing the carefully preserved instrument in her hand.

She smilingly said:

"I have brought this to cheer, not to depress you, Armand. If our father can look down upon us from his heavenly abode, he is blessing the re-union of his children, and smiling upon the son he unfortunately understood too little. I shall not play a requiem to his memory, for he is happy, I feel assured. A joyful pean will please his spirit better, if it is now lingering near us."

As in the old days, in the far-away land of her birth, Claire struck into a gay air and danced in time to it through the room, the lights flashing on her airy and brilliant figure, displaying all its grace and symmetry.

Her brother looked on with delight, and when she paused before him at the close of her unique performance and made a deep salaam, he said:

"You are a skillful exorcist, Claire. The gloom that was creeping over me has been dispelled as if by

magic. I have seen the famous dancing girls of the East, but among them was nothing to compare with you. Child, do you know that you wear the magic cestus of Venus, which must bring to your feet both young and old? I can understand now and almost forgive the infatuation that led young Courtney to act as he did."

With a brilliant smile she asked:

"Do you really think that *no one* will be able to resist me if I choose to play the part of a Circe?"

"He would be more than man if he could," was the reply.

An expression of triumphant power irradiated her face, and she impulsively exclaimed:

"How glad I am to hear you say that! Oh! brother, I have labored for this end; I have tried to make myself irresistible, that I may yet bring home to the heart that outraged mine, all and more than he made me suffer."

"What! would you waste your fascinations on such a villain as that! Do you believe him to be worth a thought from a Peri like yourself? My dear Claire, do not sacrifice your life to an idea. Thrust the memory of those days into oblivion; never speak or think of that man, or I shall be tempted to cross the Atlantic and bring him to an account for his conduct to you."

"But, Armand, I have vowed within my soul that Walter Thorne shall yet acknowledge that I was unlawfully put away; that our marriage was legal in all its forms, and there was no just ground for repudiating me. I will win him back yet; make him adore me, and then he too shall know what it is to be deserted by the one he loves."

“Ah ! bah ! don't cherish so absurd a dream. The wretch is unworthy of all that trouble. You are dead to him ; live now for yourself and for me. Enjoy the brilliant life I shall give you, without casting back a regret. God sends retribution even in this world, to all wrong doers, and you can safely leave this Thorne to his justice.”

“I must do so still—till my rival passes from the stage ; but then I——”

Latour interrupted her :

“I hope the wife who usurped your place, will live on till we are all ready to put on the robes of immortality. It will be best for you if she does ; but seriously, dear Claire, I would not have a bright, sweet spirit such as yours marred by thus hoarding thoughts of vengeance against another. How can you ask God to forgive as you have forgiven if you tenaciously hold to this insane purpose ? ”

Her face drooped upon her hands, and she stood silent a few moments. Then raising it, she quietly said :

“We will talk of this no more, Armand ; but one thing must be settled. What name shall I bear in the character of a young widow ? It must not be either yours or my father's, or gossip may make itself busy with my antecedents.”

“Under what name were you enrolled in your school ? ”

“As the adopted daughter of Mrs. Courtney. I went by her name, but I do not wish to retain that when I am entitled to one of my own.”

“You would not surely be introduced as Madame Thorne ? ”

“No. But I shall not give up my right to Walter’s name altogether. I will translate it into your language, and call myself Madame L’Epine. How do you approve of that?”

Latour saw how deeply in earnest she was, and after sorrowfully regarding her a brief space, said :

“If it will gratify you to bear the shadow of that man’s name, as you hold the shadowy relation of wife to him, I will not refuse my sanction ; but it is given on the condition that his true name shall never be mentioned between us again. But that he has given me the power to claim you as my companion by acting in the base manner he did, I would not allow the same world to hold us both. As it is, it will not be well for him ever to cross my path.”

Claire shivered, but she calmly said :

“I will mention him no more. Henceforth I am Madame L’Epine ; that will suffice for the present. What the future may bring forth neither you nor I can foresee. Let us resume our music. I am sure that you also play on the violin ; take it, and let me hear you.”

Without uttering a word Latour took the violin, and executed a difficult movement. Claire placed herself before the fine toned piano, and improvised an accompaniment. Suddenly he seemed possessed by a musical demon. Theme after theme was played with the skill of a master, and Claire still continued to strike the chords that harmonized with them. At length he laid the violin aside, and said :

“I believe the spirit of my father has moved my arm to-night ; never before have I played so well, yet I am much out of practice. Good night, Claire. It is

not late, but I feel exhausted, and I have something to do in my laboratory. You can amuse yourself with your books and music for the remainder of the evening. To-morrow you will have your friends to entertain, and I hope you will be happy with them."

He kissed her brow, and left the room as if unwilling to break the spell the music had left upon him.

Claire, still thrilling with excitement, tried to quiet her nerves by playing on, and till a late hour of the night the lonely experimenter in the distant tower faintly heard the vibrations of the music echoing through the walls so long unaccustomed to such sounds.

But in the absorption of his favorite pursuit, Latour soon ceased to heed them, or to think of the new influence that had come into his arid life. It was strange that a man of hard, practical sense, in the ordinary affairs of life, should have yielded his mind to the visionary schemes which filled that of the chemist; but no seeker after this delusive phantom was ever more earnest in his belief that ultimate success would crown his efforts to discover the secret of the transmutation of metals, than M. Latour was.

Already had he wasted immense sums on this vain chimera, and large as his fortune was, there was danger that his crucibles would ultimately absorb it all. On this night he found that nothing would work well, and he finally concluded that he was himself unfitted for the labor he had undertaken. His nerves were unstrung, and at a late hour he suffered the fire in the furnace to slacken, and threw open the windows of the tower.

As he stood in the deep silence of midnight, looking

out upon the blue vault of Heaven thickly studded with stars, he suddenly felt as if a cold hand was laid upon his heart, and a spiritual voice seemed to whisper to his inner consciousness :

“ You are risking all for naught ; you will go on to the fatal end, but you have first a duty to perform by her who has no other to look to. Give, while you possess the power to do so honorably. Secure to Claire the means of living in the affluence for which you will give her a taste ; that done, make what use you please with the wealth you have so hardly won.”

Cold drops burst out upon his forehead, so strongly was he impressed that something not of earth was near him. He turned slowly, and surveyed the brilliantly lighted room ; but not even a shadow was visible ; and throwing himself upon his chair, he muttered :

“ Whether the warning were supernatural or only the suggestion of my own better judgment, it will be well to act on it, and that too without delay. I shall die as my father did—alone, and in the night. Death steals on the men of our race as a thief in the darkness, and for generations not one has been able to escape the doom. I am not old, but I am broken down before my time by all I have passed through. My debt to my father must be paid with noble interest, for this enchanting child shall never suffer through me.”

Late as the hour was, he opened his desk and drew up the draft of a settlement to be made on Claire. The next day it was taken to his lawyer, and promptly executed : he gave her the chateau of Latour, with the small estate attached to it, and an income of thirty thousand francs was secured to her from other sources.

This done, the remainder of his fortune Latour con-

sidered himself entitled to risk in any way he chose, though he firmly adhered to the belief that he would eventually increase it beyond the power of imagination to grasp, and become the benefactor of the human race through the results of his chemical combinations.

A week later, when he presented this magnificent gift to his sister, she exclaimed :

“Thirty thousand a year ! That is six thousand dollars for my own use. It is too much, Armand ; and how can you give me your ancestral home ? I thought it was entailed.”

“There is no such law in France now. Latour came to me through the will of my uncle, as it will to you through mine. I have no other on whom to bestow it, and I wish you to feel that you have as good a right here as I have. As to the income, it is but a tithe of mine, and you will find ample use for it in the brilliant circle of which you will soon become a member. Many Parisian women spend thrice as much annually on their toilette. Your allowance, with the presents I shall make you, will enable you to be what I wish to see you—one of the best dressed women in our extravagant city.”

She radiantly replied :

“I should think so, indeed ! The sum seems inexhaustible to me in so short a space of time as a year. I will not deny that I love splendor, but I love still better the generous man who has secured me independence for life. I should not have found it difficult to ask you for what I wanted, Armand, but it is as well for me to know how far I may go without encroaching on your liberality. I shall keep within my income, let temptations assail me as they may.”

So Claire thought then, but in the scenes in which she soon began to play a conspicuous part, she found that, with her extravagant tastes and careless disregard of money, it was not so easy to keep her promise as she had supposed. More than once her brother came to the rescue, and paid bills for her so large that she feared even to look at the sum total. But he always consoled her by saying:

“What is mine is yours, to use as you please. As long as my fortune lasts, you shall enjoy it to the utmost, in the way most agreeable to you.”

So Claire made new bills, gave with a liberal hand, and as she had said—she had her swing, happily unconscious that this golden Pactolus might fall, and her own settlement be all that remained of the wealth accumulated by years of toil and distasteful occupation beneath the burning sun of an Eastern clime.

Yet what Claire so prodigally squandered was a mere trifle in comparison with that which was devoured by the homely furnace in the old tower.

Like the cry of the Moloch, it was ever, give—give! and nothing was yielded in return save the residuum of that ponderous metal which weighed as a nightmare on the soul of the experimenter. Yet he still clung to his infatuation—still believed that a triumphant result would yet be obtained, and his labors eventually meet their reward.

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE AT LATOUR.

SOON after breakfast was over on the following morning, a new and elegantly appointed equipage was driven to the door, drawn by a pair of Arabian horses, which had been brought by M. Latour from the East. A driver and footman in livery stood ready to take their new mistress to Paris.

Claire was enraptured with this new proof of her brother's liberality, and expressed herself in glowing terms to him. He smilingly said :

“This is your state carriage, Madame, but I have ordered a pony phaeton for you, that you may drive yourself, as the English ladies do. Of course, one reared in the country as you have been, knows how to ride on horseback, and, in my stable, is another Arabian as gentle as a lamb, yet as swift as the wind. Saladin shall be yours, and you can order an equestrian outfit as soon as you please.”

“Of course I shall do that, and lose no time in getting mounted. I am passionately fond of riding, and no gift could be more acceptable to me. You really overwhelm me, Armand, and, if I did not believe you to be as rich as you are liberal, I should hesitate about accepting so much from you.”

“Hush, child! If I did not lavish my money on you, I should throw it away in some other manner less productive of pleasure to myself. To witness your radiant delight is a source of gratification to me; I am thankful to be able to make one human being happy.”

“ You may feel assured that you render me so, my dear brother. I seem suddenly to have stepped into fairy-land. *Au revoir* ; I shall bring back mamma and Julia to visit the good magician, who is better than Midas, for he turns gold into everything that can minister to taste and enjoyment.”

Latour placed her in the carriage, and closing the door himself, said :

“ I have business to attend to in the city, and I shall follow you in half an hour : but you will not see me, for I must consult with my lawyer. When I return I hope to find you established here with your friends.”

Claire nodded, smiled, and the carriage rolled through the long avenue, in which men were busily at work completing the renovation which had been commenced on the previous day. The long-neglected grounds had already assumed the trim and well-kept appearance of a gentleman's park ; and the heart of the young chatelaine swelled with pride and exultation as she thought that all this had been done for her sake.

Then a sigh bubbled up from the depths of her soul as she remembered her father—his days of toil and privation, willfully endured, when his son was rolling in wealth, and anxious to use it for him as liberally as he was pouring it forth for her. But it was too late to grieve for that now, and Claire, in the bright present, soon forgot the sombre past : forgot almost that she was the repudiated wife of Walter Thorne, with a vow of retribution registered against him.

On gaining the city she drove first to her modiste and ordered a riding-habit and cap of the newest style. On reaching Mrs. Courtnay's lodgings she found her

quite ready to leave, and Julia was in the wildest spirits at the prospect of freedom from lessons, and the enjoyment of country pleasures.

Old Betty, too, was radiant, for the air of Paris did not agree with her, and the duties of waiting-maid had long since proved so onerous that she had petitioned her mistress to allow her to assume those of cook in the modest establishment kept by her. Betty had learned to speak a wretched jargon, which she called Frenchy; she managed to make herself intelligible to the class she was thrown among, but she pined for the sight of people of her own color, and had once even attempted to cultivate an acquaintance with a sable follower of the Turkish ambassador, whom she casually encountered in a shop where both were buying tobacco.

The disgust of the old woman was extreme when she found that he could not, or would not, understand her polyglot language; and Betty emphatically declared that "she did not believe in stuck-up niggers."

Her foreign experiences would have been very entertaining if they could have been taken down in her own language, and spiced with her comments on the doings of the *Munsheers*, as she called all French people, irrespective of sex. Claire laughed when she thought of the meeting between her old nurse and Zolande, and wondered what would result from it.

Betty looked at her brilliant face, and said:

"I allers thought you'd come to suffin' gran', Missy, an' so you has. Bress the Lor' for all his massies! I aint had a good look at your brudder yit, but de Madame says he's like the old marster. What for he nebber come to 'Meriky to see his fader, an' to give him some o' de money dey say he's got so much on?"

"It's a long story, mammy, and I can't explain it now. But Armand was not to blame for neglect of duty; you may take my word for that, or I should not love him as I do."

"Den he's good to you, Rosebud? Well, if he is *dat*, 'taint none o' my bizness to be settin' up in judgment onto him, so I'll take him on trus', honey."

Betty was sent out in a light wagon in charge of the baggage, and the two ladies took their places in the carriage, accompanied by Julia. After a very pleasant drive they reached the lodge and passed under the shade of the trees that formed the long avenue. In some surprise at the neat appearance of the grounds, Mrs. Courtney said:

"From your description of Latour, I expected to find it in rather a dilapidated condition; but every thing seems in perfect order to me."

"So it is now; my brother is a good genius, and he has literally caused the wilderness to blossom as the rose in the short space of twenty-four hours. Order has been brought out of chaos, for when I first saw the place two days ago it was almost like an Indian jungle. Armand is a wonderful man, for he has not only had this transformation accomplished, but he has already organized his household on a liberal footing and brought to the chateau what he thought would particularly please me. My brother will try to make me happy, and I intend to be so, in spite of all drawbacks."

"I can see no reason why you should not, my dear. Your lot, after all your trials, promises to be a most fortunate one. Love and care are necessary to a woman's happiness, and these you will receive from your brother. Fraternal affection is quite as precious

as conjugal, and often affords more serene enjoyment. An object to love is what the heart craves, and what matters it whether it be brother, child or husband, provided it is worthy !”

“ I shall try to adopt your philosophy, mamma, and after my experience I certainly shall not pine for wedded bliss. That would be the last degree of weakness, not to call it positive imbecility.”

“ Why, Claire, do you never intend to get married again ?” asked Julia, with widely distended eyes. “ You are so pretty that somebody *will* have you. I wanted Andrew to ask you first, but he would court cousin Emma. She is very nice, but I love you best.”

Mrs. Courtnay had thought it best to conceal from Julia the attempted abduction made by her brother, and she merely accounted for Claire’s absence that evening by saying that an accident had happened which led to a meeting with M. Latour, and he had taken his sister to his chateau. She now coldly said :

“ Do not talk nonsense, Julia. Andrew and Claire fully understand each other, and much as I am attached to her, I think she will be happier here than with us. When Emma becomes your sister you will transfer your enthusiastic affection to her and soon think no one like her.”

“ Cousin Emma isn’t bright, gay and bewitching as my Claire is, and I shall never think as much of her,” asserted Julia ; “ but I shall like her well enough, I dare say, when she comes to live at the Grange.”

“ Of course you will, pet,” said her friend ; “ but look—there is Latour. The central portion was once a feudal stronghold, and Armand says it was built centuries ago. More than once it has been besieged,

but never taken. In the bloody revolution a party of aristocrats took refuge in it, were attacked by the *sans culottes*, and fought till the last man among them was killed. My brother's uncle had fled to England; his property was confiscated and a price set on his head. When Napoleon restored order again, he came back, and regained what was left of his fortune; but it would have been a poor inheritance for Armand if he had not possessed something of his own to add to it."

Julia grew pale and tremulously said:

"If people have been killed here, I shall be afraid to sleep in Latour."

"But, my dear child, you will not be shut up in the tower. My brother has appropriated that, and the wing we shall inhabit was built within the last thirty years. It is all modern and handsomely fitted up."

The carriage here drew up in front of a flight of terraced steps which led to the door. Stone urns filled with plants in full bloom had been placed on each side of the flagged walk leading to the house, and through this fragrant avenue Claire conducted her friends and offered them a graceful welcome to her new home.

She then led the way to the apartment prepared for Mrs. Courtnay, and with the gleeful abandon of a child, pointed out all the improvements her brother had made in the brief space of time at his command.

But another agreeable surprise awaited her. On the toilette was a dressing-case of *papier mache* with mountings of gold of excellent workmanship. Within the open lid lay a slip of paper on which was written:

"FROM CLAIRE TO HER BELOVED BENEFACTRESS."

Mrs. Courtnay glanced at the words, flushed slightly and said :

“ You are a most extravagant creature, Claire ; and I fear that you are attempting to pay me in costly gifts for what I have freely done for you.”

“ Indeed, you wrong me, mamma. This is from my brother, given in my name, and of course you cannot refuse it. I was not even aware of his intention to afford me this gratification. Let us examine the interior, for I think that Julia has not been overlooked, and we shall find something pretty intended for her. Armand delights in pleasant surprises.”

Mrs. Courtnay took up a parcel wrapped in paper, and labeled with her daughter's name.

“ This is for Julia, and it was left for her to open, herself, I suppose.”

Julia eagerly sprang forward, cut the strings, and unfolding several wrappings of tissue paper, displayed an enameled egg with her name set in seed pearls upon the side. A little examination disclosed a spring which, on being touched, opened the lid, and a tiny bird sprang out quivering its wings upon a green spray. It sang a fashionable air, and when the performance was closed, returned to the nest within and the egg closed of itself. The little girl was almost wild with delight.

“ What an exquisite present,” she exclaimed. “ I have always wanted a musical box, and this is the most beautiful one that could be imagined. Why, Claire, your brother must be as rich as the ancient king I was reading about the other day, to be able to give so much away.”

“ My dear, he would give you and your mother half

his fortune for taking care of me so long, if he could only induce her to accept it. The cost of these things is a mere bagatelle to what mamma has expended for me ; but that is not what you must consider. You must comprehend the feeling that prompts the gift, otherwise Armand will consider his efforts to please you a failure."

"I believe I understand. M. Latour likes to see people happy, and I am sure he has made me so."

Her mother smiled and said :

"And I too, Julia, am gratified by these elegant offerings to both of us. But, Claire, you must make your brother understand that these must be the last, or I shall feel tempted to decline his hospitality during my stay in France."

"Do not make such a threat as that, mamma, though there is little danger that you would be allowed to carry it into effect. Armand has too much tact not to know how far he may go, but he feels the obligations I am under to you, and he naturally wishes to make some slight return for them. I will leave you now to prepare for luncheon ; after that is over we can amuse ourselves till my brother's return. Dinner will be served at five, and he will be here in time for it."

Claire went to her own room, in which she was surprised to find Betty and Zolande talking and gesticulating at each other in a manner that was much too animated to indicate friendly relations between them.

The Frenchwoman flushed, and apologetically said :

"I beg pardon, my lady, but that 'Merican *would* come in here to see your room, and after she got in I couldn't get her out again. She looks more like a old monkey than anything else, and I don't think she has much more manners than one."

Betty partially understood her, and she indignantly broke in:

“What dat you’m sayin’ to my nuss-chile? *Singe*—*singe*, dat mean ape. Is you a-callin’ of a ’spectable cullud lady names sich as dat? I’ll pay yer back, you *munsheer*, you’s a goraff, dar! dat’s what *you* is, wi’ dat tall white cap upon yer head. Muslin’s cheap, I reckon, or you wouldn’t put so much in your riggin. It’s *leide*, it’s *vielain*. I hopes you un’stan’s what *dat* means anyhow.”

The offended housekeeper drew herself up to her most stately height and said:

“I can’t understand much of what she says, my lady, but she means to be rude, and I can’t put up with that from such a looking-creature as she is.”

Though this was spoken in pretty good French, Betty understood it, and with a grimace retorted:

“If I want any better lookin’ than you, I’d go hang myself. I used to be called black Wenus on de plantation, but my people wouldn’t think you was no whar if you went ’mong ’em a puttin’ on yer white trash airs.”

“Hush mammy,” commanded Claire, imperatively. “I will not have a quarrel between you and Zolande. You are a guest here, and you must be polite to the housekeeper; besides, she was my brother’s nurse, and of course expects more consideration than an ordinary servant.”

“Well, if she was, so was I *your* nuss, honey, an’ she ain’t no better’n me, *she* ain’t a gwine to order *me* roun’ nohow.”

“Very well. If you refuse to conduct yourself properly, I will send you down to the lodge to stay with

the gate-keeper and his wife. Another attendant can be found for mamma while she is here. I will have no discord in my brother's house, for he would be greatly annoyed if he heard of this absurd quarrel between you and Zolande."

"Oh, Lor' honey, don' talk o' sendin' me way, for I couldn't stan' it, 'deed I couldn't! As to dat *Munsheer* thar, I'll promise to keep de peace wid her; dat is, if she don't go to callin' of me names. *Singe*, indeed! I'll singe her eyebrows off if she says dat again."

Zolande could not understand her, but she stood lowering, and defiant, and with some effort addressed her young lady respectfully:

"Shall the 'Merican not go with me to the servants' apartments, my lady? She has no business in here, as I tried to make her understand. Jest to think, I thought all the Meriky people was like that black monster there. As she called me one to you, I hope my calling her one won't offend you."

"You misunderstood her, Zolande, Betty is a good creature, and if you will be very polite to her, she will become friendly, and afford you much entertainment. She has shrewdness enough, and she comprehends a great deal that is not expressed. As a native of *la belle France*, you are too well-bred to take offence at this poor ignorant creature. Let her see that you have consideration enough for her, to treat her kindly in spite of her color, and you will make her a friend."

"I'd as soon make friends with the gorilla in the public garden, but if my lady insists, I suppose I must try to be civil to her. But hadn't I better leave her with you awhile 'till you've tamed her down a little? Finette ran away as soon as she saw her, and she's afraid to come back while the creature is here."

“You can go, and I will see what I can do.”

Zolande made her exit as quickly as possible, and Claire, accustomed from infancy to black servants, was not prepared for the feeling of repulsion manifested toward her sable friend. But as she glanced toward the old woman, she could not repress a merry smile at the claim she had asserted to be called a Venus.

She saw before her a fat, dumpy figure, which looked as if carved out of ebony, with a wrinkled face surmounted by a mass of grizzled hair, around which a brilliant silk handkerchief was wound in the form of a turban. Heavy gold hoops in her ears, and a string of yellow beads around her short neck, betrayed the fondness of the savage for gaudy colors and gay ornaments, however unsuited to the age of the wearer.

Betty observed Claire's amusement, and grimly asked :

“What for you larfin,' Missy? Cos you's sent dat *Munsheer* off widout her ax my pardon for 'sultin of a cullud lady what lived along wid you, and took care on you so many years? I jis came in here to see de fine things yer brudder's give yer, an' my gracious! if de gal dat was in here didn't scuttle out like I had hurt her. I ain't used to such low ways myself, an' I ain't nothin' to be scared at neither.”

“These are country people, and I don't suppose they ever saw a darkey before,” said Claire, soothingly. “You and Madelon got along together so well, that I had no idea there would be any difficulty here.”

“Eh! Madelon has some gumption, but these *Mun-sheers* is jist a pack o' fools. Whar's my mistiss? I'll go an' stay in her room, an' that old goraff won't come thar to order me out, I reckon.”

“Yes, that will be best, come now, before mamma leaves her apartment, and I will explain what has happened.”

Betty followed her from the room, uttering exclamations of surprise and delight as she passed through the different apartments and saw how elegantly they were fitted up.

Mrs. Courtnay listened with some surprise and annoyance, to a relation of what had passed between Betty and the housekeeper, she said :

“I suppose they have never seen a negro before, and of course their evidences of aversion were offensive to Betty. It will be best for her to remain in my dressing-room ; her bed can be made there, and her meals brought to her. Anything will be better than to have a constant turmoil among the servants on her account.”

“She can stay there for the present, and I will see what can be done for her. I shall not feel satisfied if mammy cannot be made as comfortable in my house as she can be anywhere. Zolande does not know her place ; she presumes on having been the nurse of my brother, but I shall make her understand that *my* nurse is entitled to as much consideration in this house as she is.”

Betty was left in solitary state in the bed-chamber, delighted with everything around her and willing to be alone that she might pry into drawers and armoires without being checked.

Claire conducted her guests to the music-room, and induced Julia to play on the piano for her mother while she flitted to the house-keeper's room to speak with her as to the treatment she should exact from her toward Betty.

As she expected, all the new servants were collected there, actively discussing the barbarian who had been brought among them. Assuming all the dignity of which she was mistress, Claire spoke to them of the faithful services of Betty, and her own affection for her. She demanded that the old woman should be received among them, and treated with the kindness and consideration due to her, giving them plainly to understand that she would permit no other course of action among the new comers; as to Pierre and Zolande, they were family servants, and of course would maintain the honor of the house by treating guests of every grade with the courtesy that was due to them.

Pierre took it on himself to reply :

"I told my old woman that she was silly to mind what the negro said. Of course she is a savage, but we are civilized, and we'll do what will please you, my lady. We was just talking it over when you came in, and we agreed that it wouldn't do to leave the poor creature with nobody to talk to, even if she is a black-amoor. She's very ugly, but there isn't anything about her to scare one. I shall ask her to sit by me at the servant's table, and you sha'n't hear any more of this nonsense, Madame."

"So much the better," replied Claire. "I do not wish to have to complain to my brother about so absurd a thing, and if no further offence is given, I will say nothing to him on the subject."

"Thank you, my lady, that will be best. M. Armand would be angry that the woman who nursed you wasn't considered fit to associate with such as us."

The result of this compact was that Betty received an apology which she loftily accepted; the seat of

honor on Pierre's left hand was given to her at the servants' table, and she gave such marvellous accounts of the land from which she came, that she soon became the centre of interest to those who had so lately shrunk from her as of a different species from themselves.

Elated by the consideration in which she was held, the old woman gave the reins to her imagination, and the wonderful stories she told of the land of her birth could only have been matched by those found in the adventures of Baron Munchausen.

M. Latour came back in time for dinner, and the cordial pleasure he manifested in the society of his guests, made Mrs. Courtnay feel perfectly at home in his house.

In the evening they had music, and when the two girls were tired of playing, they went out into the soft summer night, and promenaded on the terrace walk beneath the windows, leaving M. Latour and Mrs. Courtnay in earnest conversation.

Their subject was Claire, and after returning his warmest thanks for all Mrs. Courtnay had done for his sister, Latour went on :

“ The crowning grace, dear Madam, will now be to remain with us till Claire is fairly launched into society. A maternal friend will be invaluable to her, in her first season, yet she objects to having a stranger brought hither as a companion for her. Your son will not care to return to his native land till he has had time to recover from his recent disappointment; he can visit those portions of Europe which are yet unknown to him, and carry back a store of observations that will be useful to him throughout his future life.

Nothing dissipates sorrow like travel, I know from experience. While Mr. Courtney pursues his, you can remain with your protégée, and guard her in her new career."

"I would gladly do so if it were possible, for I feel the deepest interest in Claire, and I dread for her the unlimited freedom and indulgence you seem ready to grant her. She is too young to be left without some guiding hand to restrain her, yet I cannot, at present, see my way clear to becoming the friend you think she will need. I have been long absent from my home, and I fear that my return is almost a necessity. I shall, however, be guided by my son's wishes. If he shrinks from going back at the time proposed, I must remain in Europe till he is ready to accompany me. Should Andrew wish to extend his travels, I will gladly accept the position of chaperon to my godchild. It is difficult to give her up, even to you, M. Latour, and but for this unfortunate infatuation on the part of my son, I should never have gained my own consent to do so."

"I am not surprised at that, for Claire has already wound herself into my affections so deeply that I should have a hard struggle if I were called on to part from her. But she assures me that I shall never be required to do that. Her unhappy experience has disgusted her with the thought of marriage, although I consider her free to form new ties if she can be won to love any other than the man who so basely treated her."

"You believe as I do, then, that Claire still cherishes a tender feeling for Walter Thorne, in spite of his shameful conduct to her?"

“I am afraid that, underlying all her bitterness and scorn for him, is the memory of what he once was to her. Claire is scarcely conscious of this, herself, but if such were not the fact, she would not so tenaciously cling to the hope that she shall be reclaimed by him. She declares that she would only return to Thorne to bring retribution to him; but to accomplish that, she must deaden all the finer impulses of her nature and become what I should be sorry to believe she could ever be.”

“Claire *must* give up that fatal delusion, Monsieur. If she does not, it will become the bane of her life. I rejoice in the agreeable future opening before her, as the surest means of giving her a rational view of her actual position. When she is a brilliant and courted woman of society, the memory of those wretched days must gradually fade away. She will have no time to think of them, or to resent the wrong of which she was the victim.”

“She gave me a brief outline of her unhappy history, on the first evening we met, but it seemed to excite her so painfully to speak of those events, that I did not ask for details. But if you will give them, I shall be very glad to hear them.”

Mrs. Courtnay commenced with the arrival of Thorne in the valley, and gave a clear account of all that had occurred during his stay. She excused Claire's elopement by stating that the inexperienced child believed the consent given to her union with her lover by M. Lapierre, on the night of his decease, was sufficient sanction without appealing to herself.

When she had finished, Latour thoughtfully said:

“It is a story which might be held up as a warning

to every willful and impulsive girl. I believe, after all, that our system is best. In your country too much freedom is granted to the young. In France, a child such as Claire then was, would be too strictly guarded to allow her the chance to experience a grand passion while she should have been occupied with her studies. I am only surprised that my father departed so far from the customs of his native land as to permit this stranger the opportunity to win her from him."

"M. Lapierre was so situated that he could not prevent it. I received Mr. Thorne as my guest as soon as he would consent to be removed, but the mischief was then done. The young people had fallen irrevocably in love with each other, for Walter Thorne was as deeply infatuated with Claire as a man can be. I have never doubted that he loved her truly and sincerely. I believe that he hoped to obtain the forgiveness of his father for the step he took, though I must admit that he acted most dishonorably in showing forged letters to your father and myself."

"If Thorne had been as sincere as you believe, do you think that he could have given his hand to another woman?"

"He was betrothed to Miss Willard before he met with Claire, and his father held him to his pledges under a threat of disinheritance. He was not a man who could make his way in the world, and when ruin stared him in the face, I suppose he thought it better to give up the choice of his own heart than to bring her to poverty. He knew nothing of you, or of Claire's claims on you, or the result might have been different."

"I only wish he could have known how gladly I would have purchased happiness for my sister at any

cost, for it is a fearful thing to have the heart thrown back upon itself, as hers has been. Badly as that man has acted, she loved him; and he might have made her an affectionate and kind husband. As it is, she is cast a waif upon life, embittered against my sex, and ready to use her power to charm against the whole race of man. It is a dangerous career on which she is about to embark, but who can arrest her in it?"

"You alone possess that power, Monsieur. Your influence can accomplish a great deal with Claire, for she already loves and honors you almost as highly as she once did her father."

He shook his head sadly.

"I am but a dreamer, and not a man of society. It palled upon me long ago, and I gave it up. Claire will be the life and soul of scenes that would now only weary me; and to others I must relinquish the task of guiding her through the maelstrom of fashion and folly into which she will so eagerly plunge. I can refuse her nothing that she desires, and I cannot assume the onerous character of Mentor to one whose tenderest affection I am so anxious to appropriate."

"Yet it is your duty to guard her in every possible way."

"Duty is a hard task-master," he replied with a smile. "I promise to do my best for her, but I cannot pledge myself to restrain her freedom in any way. She wishes to be presented to society as a widow, and that frees her from the trammels of young lady-hood at once. She also insists that the name of her husband shall not be entirely relinquished. She will call herself Madame L'Epine: and, unable to resist her entreaties, I have consented that she shall do so."

Mrs. Courtney listened in surprise. She said :

“From that I perceive that Claire is as tenacious of her purpose as ever. The only hope I have to save her from herself is, in the long life of her rival. While Mrs. Thorne lives she will do nothing against her husband, for she asserts that all she desires is to have the legality of her own marriage declared among those who make up his world. She could very well afford to bear the censure of people she knows or cares little about, if she could be induced to think so.”

“I agree with you, and I shall make every effort to induce her to adopt our views on this subject. But we must be very tender with her, Mrs. Courtney ; she has suffered keenly, and no one can foretell what may yet be in reserve for her. I can never exercise authority over her, for she already winds me around her fingers, and does with me what she pleases. To strew flowers on her path shall be the aim of my life, and if I could pluck every thorn from them I would gladly do it. While I live I shall stand as a barrier between her and that man, even if his wife should die ; but when I am gone she must guide her own bark, either to shipwreck or safety. I can only pray that it may be the last.”

With a faint smile, Mrs. Courtney replied :

“I see plainly that you are as much the slave of this young creature as the most devoted of her adorers will be. She must possess some subtle charm for your sex that is inscrutable to ours, for she wins influence over every man that is thrown into intimate association with her. My poor boy has loved her from her childhood, yet I was blind enough to imagine that when she was placed beyond his reach, he would forget his early at-

tachment to her. I will frankly say that, fond as I am of Claire, I did not wish her to become Andrew's wife, for they possess too much of the same temperament to have been happy together. Yet perhaps it would have been better for both if fate had not thwarted their union."

"Perhaps so, but who can tell? We are but blind agents of destiny, and supreme intelligence alone can see what is for the best. We must leave results in the hand of God, and do what seems to us right."

At that moment Claire came in, followed by Julia. M. Latour asked for more music, and the three performed concerted pieces together—Claire on the harp, Julia the piano, and Latour on the violin.

At a late hour the party separated for the night, and Julia held up her cheek to be kissed by her host, as she naïvely said :

"I like you, Monsieur, and you may kiss me as Uncle Lapierre used to when I was a good girl. I am going to make my beautiful bird sing his pretty song, and then pray to God to make you as happy as you have made me by your charming present. It is better than a live bird in a cage, for that might pine for freedom, but that this one likes his little nest is proved by his slipping back to it so nicely when his chant is ended."

"I am glad you like your little toy, *petite*. Yes, pray for me, my child, for the prayers of such innocents as you are heard by Him who has said that the angels of little children are always near him."

He kissed the smooth cheek, pressed his lips to the brow of Claire, and offered his hand to Mrs. Courtnay.

She smilingly said :

"Good-night. I have passed a most delightful day

beneath your roof, M. Latour, and I have no doubt it will be followed by many others equally pleasant. I shall linger in these charming shades as long as I consistently can, and when I leave them I shall carry with me many agreeable memories."

"The longer you remain with us, Madame, the better. I trust that your slumbers will be visited only by dreams as pleasant as your society has made the few past hours to me."

Claire accompanied Mrs. Courtnay to her chamber, where she found Betty in a state of great elation over the present of a poplin dress and a dozen silk handkerchiefs of gorgeous colors, which had been sent to her by the master of the house.

Claire had talked to her brother much of her nurse; and, with his usual thoughtful kindness, M. Latour had remembered the old woman, while in town, and had purchased for her what he thought would most please her fancy.

Half an hour later the chateau was buried in repose, save the tower room. There the tireless experimenter resumed his labors until day was approaching, but with no more satisfactory result than before.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE VICTIM'S TRAIL.

IN the freedom of country life several weeks passed by very delightfully. Claire's pony-carriage was sent out, and her brother taught her how to drive the

spirited little animals he had purchased for her. She and Julia also rode on horseback every evening, attended by a smart groom who was attached to the especial service of his young mistress, and life seemed as sunny with them all as the bright summer days.

At the end of the third week Mrs. Courtney began to feel anxious for a letter from her son, for she had not heard from him since he went away. But just at the right moment a communication came from Andrew, dated from Baden. A portion of it ran as follows :

“I am in better spirits than you may think possible, after what has happened so lately to depress and humiliate me ; I begin to see how stupidly persistent I was in the moonstruck madness that led me on in pursuit of an ignis fatuus that must ever have eluded me.

“I am most thankful that I was saved in time from consummating the villainy I meditated toward Claire. She is better without me, as I am without her—I can see that very plainly now that my mental vision is clear again.

“My heart has gone back to its allegiance to the gentle and true woman who shall be my helpmate if she will forgive the inconstancy of which I have been guilty. I have written to Emma and told her the whole truth, and I am unwilling to return to Virginia before I hear from her.

“If you will consent to remain in France till spring opens, and allow me the liberty to roam about at my own will, I think I shall quite regain my true equilibrium. Then, if Emma consents, I will go back and celebrate our marriage as soon as possible after my

return. I will join you at the port of embarkation, for I do not wish ever to look upon the bewildering face of Claire again. Its wondrous charm has once made me untrue to my manhood, and I will not expose myself to the same temptation again.

“The picture I robbed you of I will restore to you, and you must keep it in some recess to which I shall never attempt to penetrate. Though it is not like her now, it might be a dangerous possession to me, and my future wife will scarcely like to see me glance toward it.

“I have not been tempted to play, though I am a frequent looker-on at the tables, where every mean and pitiful passion is illustrated by the flushed and greedy gamblers. From observation, I have learned many of the tricks practiced by them, but I should scorn to avail myself of them unless some good end was to be attained by doing so.

“I have had two letters from you since you went to Latour, and I cannot tell you how glad I am to know that Claire has fallen into the hands of so good and so noble a man as her brother must be. I hope you will enjoy your visit to the utmost, and I shall feel grateful to you if you will accept M. Latour's proposal to matronize Claire during the first few months of her novitiate in the fashionable world. It will be better for her, and at the same time afford me the opportunity I desire to travel more extensively than I have hitherto done.

“I do not venture to send any message to Claire, so with much love to Julia, I am your affectionate son,

“ANDREW COURTNEY.”

Mrs. Courtney read these lines with a lightened

heart. She felt all her old confidence in their writer revive, and she immediately wrote to tell him that his request was granted, and she would remain in Europe till the following May.

No one was more pleased with this decision than Latour, and he immediately began the improvements he was contemplating in his town residence. Every part of it was newly fitted up and furnished. No expense was spared, and the palace of Armida could scarcely have rivalled this modern one, in which a queen of beauty as fascinating as the fabled Circe was to hold her court.

As the representative of an ancient family Latour had the entree to many of the best houses in Paris, and the liberal use he made of his money gave him a prestige for which good blood alone would not have sufficed.

When the gay season fairly opened, Claire found herself installed as the mistress of a splendid establishment, the cynosure of a brilliant circle which soon elected her as its especial idol, and if ever the head of a girl of eighteen was turned by flattery, hers was in danger of being so.

She lived like one in an enchanted dream, and for a season she almost forgot the blight that had fallen on her young life. With perfect health, gay spirits and careless heart, she quaffed from the intoxicating cup offered her only the sparkling foam that exhilarated her pulses, and made life seem one long dream of triumphant joy. She did not believe that the lees of that cup could ever be reached by her, or prove bitter to the taste, if by chance they mingled with the magic draught.

Mrs. Courtnay spent a most agreeable season with her protégée, and hoped that in its progress she had succeeded in giving Claire proper ideas of what her future course should be. She submitted gracefully to be ruled by her adopted mother while she remained with her, and she wept many bitter tears when the final parting came. With a divided heart Julia clung to her early playmate, for she was eager to go back to her plantation home again, though she shrank from parting with her darling Claire.

Old Betty was in much the same state of feeling, but she was consoled for leaving the young lady behind, by thinking of the grandeur of her lot, and of how many wonderful things she would have to tell her cronies when she returned home; besides displaying to them the many handsome and valuable presents made her by her nurse-child and her brother.

Andrew joined his mother at Havre, and they crossed the ocean in safety.

Four months later the announcement of Courtnay's marriage with Emma Carleton came to Claire, and she rejoiced that he had at last reached the calm haven of matrimonial happiness with a wife who would know how to soothe the tempestuous promptings of his nature, and make him see how beautiful it is to dwell in harmony with those we love.

Before leaving Claire, Mrs. Courtnay insisted that a companion of mature years must be found for her, as she was too young, and far too admired, to be left without a female guardian.

After considerable opposition from her, the cousin Latour had referred to on the first evening they met, was invited to take up her abode with them. Madame

Laroche was a childless widow of thirty, with limited means, and great ambition to shine in society. Of course she eagerly accepted the position offered her in her cousin's family, though in some respects she was unworthy of the confidence he reposed in her.

She was facile, anxious to please the young autocrat on whose fiat she knew depended her enjoyment of the luxury she prized beyond everything, and she spared no efforts to win the confidence and affection of her new charge.

Madame Laroche was still a very handsome woman, with the graceful address and adroit management of a thorough Parisienne, and she soon made herself almost necessary to Claire, who found it very charming to be flattered and approved of, instead of finding herself restrained within certain limits, as had been the case while Mrs. Courtnay was near her.

Her brother, absorbed in his unsuccessful experiments, yielded her entirely to the influence of her new companion, scarcely deeming it necessary to utter a caution to Madame Laroche as to what was expected of her in that capacity.

The result was that Claire pursued the career she had marked out for herself, without a remonstrance being uttered. It is true that she made little effort to attract admiration, but with her transcendant beauty, her wit, and reputed fortune, that was not necessary.

No woman of her day was so much admired, and the conquests and caprices of *la belle Americaine*, became in a few years the gossip of the most exclusive circles of society.

Madame L'Epine also traveled extensively, and became a European celebrity. Claire enjoyed her suc-

cess as thoroughly as the aspirants for fame in any other walks in life would have done. She smiled on all alike, but gave decided encouragement to none; the love so lightly won, was as lightly cast away despite the agonies of her lovers, and they found it poor consolation to be told in her most dulcet tones that she had passed through the same ordeal herself, and bore within her a scathed heart, in which no buds of passion could ever again germinate.

The discarded suitors often consoled themselves by confiding their troubles to Madame Laroche, and she had tact enough to make friends of them all. "Catch a heart in the rebound," was illustrated by her, and more than one of Claire's discarded suitors would have made himself happy with the fair companion, if she had only possessed the fortune they needed.

She once laughingly said to her young friend :

"I once saw a notice of the strange names belonging to an American firm, which made me laugh, but I think you and I illustrate them."

"What were they?" asked Claire.

"U. Cheatem and I. Ketchum. Your lovers turn from your delusive smiles, and end by making love to me—ha! ha!"

"So much the better for us both, for we find the amusement and excitement we need in playing into each other's hands. As to the professions of men, I have no faith in any of them, though I sometimes think they act the part of despairing lovers to perfection. Heigho! I wonder how long this life of luxurious enchantment can last."

"As long as youth, wealth, and the power of enjoyment last," was the reply. "Make the most of the

present, and cast care to the winds, is my rule of action. When it comes, it is time enough to examine its hideous features."

"That is good philosophy, and we live in such a whirl of excitement that we have no time to think of possibilities. But I am troubled about one thing, Léonie. Don't you think that, of late, my brother looks depressed and worn? I begin to feel anxious about him."

"Yes; Armand has changed much, but I scarcely wonder at that. He passes nearly all his time in that dreary old tower, seeking after the unattainable; and when he comes in town and joins us, his mind is so filled with his failures that he has no heart to enjoy anything. Since you have spoken of this, my dear, I will say to you that Armand is wasting more gold in his experiments than he is ever likely to gain from their results. His mania, for I can give it no other name, may yet absorb the whole of his fortune. Had you not better speak with him on this subject and use your influence to induce him to abandon his ruinous pursuit?"

"I have often done so, without any result. Armand always insists that he is on the eve of realizing his dream and one more effort must bring success. It is the old fable of Tantalus brought into action in a most painful and fatal form. I would risk a great deal to rescue my brother from his delusion, but I feel that it will be impossible to do so. If he ruins himself, there is still my settlement left, and we can live together on that very comfortably."

Madame Laroche shrugged her shoulders.

"You spend every year much more than your in-

come on your toilette, besides other extravagances of which you are guilty. How could you give up the state in which you have so long lived, and come down to the necessity of considering whether you can afford a luxury that you have now only to wish for and possess?"

Claire smiled faintly, as she replied:

"If Armand could bear his disappointment, I could bear the loss of what I do not deny I highly value. As far as lay in his power, he has gratified every wish of my heart, and for years I have enjoyed the brilliant position he has given me. In my turn, I would do something for him, if I could; but if he fails at last, he will not long survive it. His noble and generous heart will break when he finds his efforts are vain to win the stake on which he has set all his hopes. I own to you that I tremble for the result."

"Then try to avert it, Claire. You can save him, if any one can, for he can refuse nothing to you. The remnant of his fortune may yet be rescued from that insatiate furnace, and with it, perhaps, Armand's reason and life. I speak strongly, for I believe all are staked on the desperate game he has played so long."

Claire raised herself from the sofa on which she had been reclining while they talked together, and with a startled look asked:

"What reason have you for speaking thus, Léonie? What do you know of my brother's affairs?"

"I know that he has withdrawn large sums from the capital he has invested in the bank, and his partner has more than once remonstrated with him. I have this from M. Lemoine himself, and he asked me to speak to you, and see if you would use your influ-

ence with Armand to give up the fire demon that is devouring this property. A million has been consumed in its remorseless depths, without yielding any result ; as much more has been spent in maintaining the style in which we live, and of the three millions he brought back with him from China but one is left."

Claire laughed :

"But one million—you talk as if that is poverty."

"But I am not speaking of dollars, remember. It is of francs, and it takes nearly five of them to make a dollar."

"After spending so many of them, I think I ought to know that," was the half mocking rejoinder. "Brought down to dollars, my brother still has an independent fortune, and I, the creature of his bounty, cannot presume to dictate to him how it shall be used ; I have already said as much to him on this subject as I dare to say, but I found him so wedded to his belief in ultimate success, that nothing I can urge will turn him from his purpose. My only hope for him lies in the accomplishment of his dream, and after all it may not be impracticable. He declares that he saw the transmutation of metals effected, and although he has hitherto missed the exact combinations, he still believes that what another has done he can do if he perseveres."

"So have believed all those who have walked on the same fatal path before," was the reply. "When it is too late you will regret that you did not attend to my warning."

"Why, what can I do ?" asked Claire, impatiently. "Have I not explained to you that on this point I am powerless ? If I asked Armand to surrender his life

to me, he would do it sooner than relinquish the pursuit that gives it all its charm. He is not like you and me. He cares nothing for the triumphs of society; they would bore him to death. He is a philanthropist; he gives now most munificently, and he seeks boundless wealth that he may lift up the down-trodden and make the hearts of the toilers of the earth sing for joy. That is his dream, and it is worth some sacrifice if it can only be realized. I only wish I was half as good as my brother. I fritter away my life in the idle pursuits of fashion, while he devotes his to a great and noble purpose. It may fail of accomplishment, but it is not the less grand for that."

"But the result of the failure to him, Claire. Think of that."

"No—why should I till it comes? I am not given to anticipate evil, and in place of wailing over defeat, we may yet crown him with a wreath of immortelles for his wonderful discovery. If the worst should come, as I said before, I have enough for both of us. I have still before me a few years of splendor, and by the time the end comes, if come it does, it may have begun to pall upon me. In fact, I feel, at intervals, slight premonitions of weariness now."

She arose as she finished speaking, and moved listlessly toward an open window. Madame Laroche looked after her somewhat anxiously. For years they had pursued the gay career in which both so delighted, and this was the first evidence of satiety on the part of her fair friend. Claire was still as brilliant and fascinating, as much sought after as in the early days of her triumphs, and this was the first indication of weariness her companion had detected.

She began to seek for its cause, and wondered if a letter from Virginia which came that morning had produced this state of feeling.

If Madame Laroche could have read the contents of that missive she would have found the clue to what puzzled her. It was from Andrew Courtney; the first he had written to Claire since his return home, and it was filled with matter which brought back to her heart in all its intensity that dream of retribution which had now so long lain in abeyance.

Nearly ten years had passed since the marriage of Andrew, and he had sons and daughters growing up around him in the old homestead, himself a contented and useful man. Yet in the depths of his heart lingered a grudge against the man who had stolen Claire from her home only to outrage and insult her; and the promise he had made to assist her to gain her revenge had never been forgotten.

Courtney was now the member of Congress from his district, and soon after his arrival in Washington, he met with the man he most loathed on earth. Walter Thorne was leading a fast life, and his domestic unhappiness was the cause assigned by his friends for his reckless career.

He gambled with a species of furore; sometimes winning, but often losing large sums. Courtney rarely played himself, though he was skillful in most games of chance; but, hearing so much of Thorne's wild betting, the thought struck him that he might render it subservient to Claire's plans. What they were he did not know, but he could, at least, offer such atonement as lay in his power, for his own conduct to her, by fulfilling the promise he had given in their last interview.

The letter will best explain the rest. It ran thus :

WASHINGTON, March 1, 18—

“MY DEAR CLAIRE:—After so many years of silence on my part, I again venture to address you with the old familiarity of our early days. I write now to tell you that I have not been forgetful of the pledge I gave you in our last painful interview ; but I will go at once to the point, and show you why I have broken my long silence.

“You are aware that I am serving my first term in Congress ; and in this city I have found the man I once thought I could never meet without seeking to destroy.

“Those evil passions are happily set at rest, thanks to the sweet influences that surround me in my home, but all the evil in me is not eradicated, as will be proved by what I am about to tell you.

“I may be doing wrong in placing this power in your hands, but it seems to me a sort of justice that is due you, however much it may be condemned by those who have never been tempted to the commission of a wrong.

“But to my story. Your false lover is, it seems, most unhappy in the marriage he made at his father's command, and he consoles himself for domestic troubles by rushing, at intervals, into the wildest dissipation.

“Thorne has been in this city several months, risking nightly at the gaming-table the fortune he secured by giving you up. His passion for high play amounts almost to insanity, and, hearing so much of his recklessness, I went one evening to a fashionable saloon to watch him.

“He had won largely before I became a spectator, but, after looking on a while, I was seized with an uncontrollable desire to stake my skill and luck against his. I rarely play, for when I do I nearly always win, and I feel as if I have robbed my antagonist when his money, thus gained, passes into my hands.

“I confess to you, however, that on this occasion, I had no such scruples. I sat down to beggar that man, and, before the night was over, *I succeeded*.

“Yes—I won everything Walter Thorne could call his own.

“At first he played cautiously enough, but, as the tide turned against him, he became desperate; betted wildly, risking thousands on a card, until his last cent was swept away. He arose, ghastly pale, and declared himself ruined. We were almost alone in the room, for others had dropped off as the hours waned; I also arose, and went out with him.

“He hoarsely said, as we gained the street:

“‘Come with me to my room, and I will give you a bond that will cover my whole estate. Of course you will sell it, and dispossess me at once.’

“‘We will talk of that presently, Mr. Thorne,’ I replied; and I went with him to the expensive apartments he occupied.

“The enclosed bond for eighty thousand dollars was then executed. He did not know who had been his antagonist till I told him my name; and I shall never forget the glare of rage that shone in his eyes, as he said:

“‘You have dogged my steps, sir, that you might gratify an old grudge, by bringing me to beggary, and now you seek to gloat over the agony of a man in my condition.’

“‘It is not for such a purpose as that that I came hither,’ I replied; ‘and if you will listen to me, you will see that your condition is not so desperate as you suppose. I shall accept the bond for the large sum I have won, but with no view of using it myself; nor will it be brought forward by any one *so long as your wife lives.*’”

“He flashed a lightning glance upon me, and asked :

“‘What do you mean, sir? Why should the life of a woman I care little enough about stand between myself and ruin?’

“I answered, ‘I do not choose to explain; let the fact suffice. Return to your home, give up the vice you no longer possess the means to gratify, and I repeat, as long as Agnes Thorne lives, you are master of your estate. At her death, you may hear from this paper, but not before. I wish you good-night, sir.’

“I hastily left the room; he called after me, but I would not return; and I evaded an effort he made to see me the next day. On the following one he left Washington, and I have heard nothing from him since.

“I transfer to you the bond; it pledges Thornhill for the payment of the money, and you are at liberty to use it as you please when your rival is no longer in your way.

“Although I have done this, Claire, for the sake of my promise to you, I sincerely hope that the life of that unhappy lady may outlast your own, that you may not be tempted to use the power I give you in any way.

“I have found happiness in a suitable marriage, and so might you if you would put aside that one fatal remembrance and allow your heart to open to the influences of affection. We are a very happy house-

hold at the Grange, and I grudge every day I am forced to spend from beneath its roof.

“My mother, as serenely handsome as ever, is the most devoted of grand-dames to my children; the boys are her especial pets, while my little daughter is the dainty darling of my heart. My sweet wife was generous enough to call her Clara, although she knew the whole history of that old love for you, and my pet is as dear to Emma as if she did not bear the name of her former rival.

“Julia’s successful career as the belle of the county will soon come to a close, as she has at last accepted Charles Berkeley, and they will be married in May. She has, doubtless, written to you herself and informed you of the change she is about to make in her condition.

“You may remember Berkely as a lad in jackets who used to haunt the Grange when Julia was a child. He has served as long for his wife as Jacob agreed to serve for his, though *he* was cheated after the Israelitish fashion. Since Julia was fifteen, he has been her most devoted adorer, and she will be twenty-two this month.

“I am very well pleased with her choice; Berkeley is a clever fellow, and sufficiently rich for every rational want. They seem to be much attached to each other, and my mother is satisfied because she thinks they *suit* each other. You know she has a theory on the subject of matrimonial alliances, and I am half inclined to give into it, since the match she induced me to make has conduced so much to my happiness and well-being.

“Emma is the very person I needed to temper my wild nature and make me ashamed to yield to the

outbursts of passion that once made me so detestable a companion. She has sense and spirit enough of her own, and I find her by no means an uninteresting life-mate, as, I frankly own, I once feared she might prove.

“The latent strength of her character and her many gentle ways of winning influence over me were unsuspected, till after she became my wife. Then I found her a charming study, and, in seeking to understand, I learned to love her with all my heart.

“I tell you this, because I know it will rejoice you to know that the woman I have made my own, claims not only my deepest respect but my tenderest affection.

“Adieu, Claire. Remember me to that good brother of yours, and thank him, even at this late hour, for rescuing us both from the wretched fate I was so anxious to force upon you. If I were with the dear ones at home, innumerable messages would be sent; but as I am here in solitary state, you must take them on trust. That you may be as happy as I am, is the earnest prayer of your friend,

“ANDREW COURTNEY.”

All the long-buried past rushed over Claire when she read those lines, and examined the paper which they enclosed. Her old desire to bring home to the man who had so bitterly deceived her the humiliation she had herself endured, awoke in full force, and she exultingly thought the means were furnished, if the woman who had usurped her place were only removed by death.

Claire had always felt the conviction that Agnes would die before her own charms were faded; there

was a vague notion of eternal justice in her warped mind which afforded her the assurance that, even on earth, Walter Thorne must meet punishment for his faithless desertion of the child who had trusted herself to his honor, and from whose hand should the retributive blow come if not from hers?

Claire had kept up a correspondence, at long intervals with Miss Digby, and from her letters she knew that little peace was found at Thornhill: that its mistress had faded and grown querulous beneath the open neglect of her husband. She gathered these facts from chance expressions used by the writer of the letters, for Miss Digby was very careful to say as little as possible about Walter Thorne and his affairs. It was only in reply to direct questions from Claire that any information was given at all.

Now she held in her possession the power to ruin him—to wrest from him the fortune for which he had sacrificed her, and a fierce joy thrilled through her veins. She asked herself:

“How long—how long must I hold this, without acting on it? Andrew has nobly atoned for his futile attempt to force me to become his wife, and I am now glad it was made. But for that he would never have served me in this questionable manner. I wonder if Walter Thorne dreams of the use to which his bond may be put? The saving clause may enlighten him, but if it does, he cannot evade the ruin that shall yet overtake him. I must stifle this yearning for immediate action, and *wait*, as I have so long done. My hour must come, though I can do nothing to hasten its advent.”

Claire put away the paper in a secure place, and re-

plied to Courtney's letter, earnestly thanking him for the service he had rendered her. What she intended to do with the bond she did not hint, but she confessed to him that, if death dissolved the ties that bound Thorne to Agnes, she should certainly feel at liberty to use the power which had been placed in her hands to its fullest extent.

When her letter was finished and sent away, Claire remembered what Madame Laroche had said of her brother's affairs, and, ordering the carriage, she drove out alone to Latour, where he had been staying almost constantly for the last few months.

It was now the middle of April, and the place was in its new dress of tender verdure, but Claire noted little of its beauty, for her eyes were sadly fixed on the cloud of smoke which arose from the tower chimney, and she thought with regret of the fruitless toil endured by the brother to whom she had given all the affection she believed herself capable of feeling.

Claire had often ventured to remonstrate with Latour on his unremitting devotion to the experiments which cost him so much, and thus far had yielded him nothing save disappointment; but he would not on this point be influenced by her. He was never disheartened by his failures. Like the phoenix, his beautiful dream of becoming the benefactor of mankind, arose from the ashes of his lost hopes, ready to commence anew the labor which would have been as disheartening as that of Sysiphus to any one less infatuated than was this seeker after the unattainable.

Claire had passed a portion of every year at Latour, and the place was dear to her as the home in which she had first learned to know and love her brother.

Through all the years they had lived together, a harsh or impatient word had never passed his lips, though on occasion he could be stern enough to others.

Latour evidently regarded her as a sacred bequest from the father whose memory he tenderly revered in spite of the long injustice he had endured from him, and he permitted Claire to make herself happy in her own way regardless of cost to himself. She knew that her brother's annual expenses were doubled by her residence with him, and she felt a little compunction when she remembered how recklessly she had squandered money since she had been with him.

Her brother had never checked her in any way, and he also lavished most expensive presents on herself and Madam Laroche. In fact, the latter had saved quite a little fortune from Latour's munificence since she had been the companion of his sister, and hence arose her desire to save him from the ruin she saw looming in the distance. Her luxurious home and large salary were too important to her to be risked on the faint chances of success in discovering the secret he had so long and vainly sought.

Claire could have scarcely explained to herself the object she had in view in seeking her brother on this afternoon. As she had said, she dared not venture on any further remonstrance, for she had already said as much as he would listen to, without producing any result. Failure seemed only to add strength to Latour's convictions that he should yet triumph. If this absorbing, yet baffling pursuit were taken from him, Claire felt that his occupation would indeed be gone, and all interest in life for him destroyed; so with a sigh she thought the residue of his fortune must vanish as so much of it had already gone—in smoke.

CHAPTER X.

A CATASTROPHE.

CLAIRE alighted from the carriage and went in, intending to go at once to the tower, but Zolande, now bent with age, met her in the vestibule, and said :

“How do you do, my lady? I declare you are as fresh and bright as the first day you came through that door holding M. Armand’s hand, but he’s changed as much as me, though he is so much younger than I be.”

“I have observed it, Zolande, and I came out in the hope that I can entice my brother back to town with me.”

“You had better not interrupt him, my lady, for he gave strict orders to let no one go up.”

“I cannot go back without seeing my brother,” said Claire. “I am always admitted when I go to him, and he will not refuse me now. I am uneasy about him, and I must see him.”

The old woman shook her head, but she made no further opposition, and Claire passed through the long dark passage which led to the tower, and ascended the steps.

When she gained the door, she hesitated a moment, but finally struck a peculiar rap upon it which always announced her presence to Latour.

She could hear the roar of the furnace, and knew that some important process was going on, but she knocked again when she found the first summons unheeded, and made an effort to turn the handle of the ponderous lock.

In another moment the door was unclosed a few inches, and a stifling blast of heated air rushed out, heavy with the fumes of the chemicals Latour had been using. She had a glimpse of him in a glass mask, and after an energetic motion of refusal, he closed the aperture, and fastened the lock on the inside.

Claire recoiled from the vapors that had escaped from the closed room, and leaned sick and faint against the wall. The next moment there was an explosion, the tower was shaken to its foundations, and the concussion tore open the heavy door.

Claire was frightened, but not stunned, and she had the courage to rush into the room which was filled to suffocation with the smoke that escaped from a rent in the furnace. Her brother lay on the floor, his mask shattered, and his cheek bleeding from a cut from the broken glass. Fortunately he was near the door, and she exerted all her strength to drag him from the tower into the purer atmosphere without.

By the time she had succeeded in doing this, the servants had rushed up the stairs to see what had happened, and one of them lifted the insensible form of his master, and bore him down to the lower part of the house.

Claire followed in a tremor of fear and anxiety, but when Latour was placed on a sofa, and cold water poured over his face and head, he began to revive. He presently sat up, and asked in a bewildered manner :

“What has happened? Who brought me here, and why do you all look so much alarmed?”

“Dear Armand,” said Claire, speaking with effort, “you have had a very narrow escape. If I had not been near you, you might have lost your life. I

dragged you out of that dreadful room and Francois brought you down. Something blew up, and there is a hole in the furnace ; the glass things are all shattered, but you are safe, thank Heaven !”

Latour covered his face with his hands, and his form shook with repressed emotion. He presently looked up and said :

“ I remember all now. It was a new combination ; all was going on well, when I left my work an instant to warn you away. Oh, Claire, your inopportune visit has snatched from me the fruition of my long cherished hopes. Success was almost within my grasp, and now it must all be done over again.”

With a gesture of command and a few words Claire dismissed the gaping domestics, and then sat down by the side of her brother, and took his hand. She softly said :

“ It may be as you say, Armand ; but I think a kind providence sent me hither to rescue you from death. If you had been left to breathe that pestilent atmosphere a few moments longer you must have perished. I feel faint and sick now from the effect of what I inhaled. I do not wonder that you are old before your time, leading the life you do in the pursuit of a phantom that ever eludes you. Dear brother, from this day let the fires go out forever, do not repair the damage that has been done ; but give up this wild dream, and consent to live among men again, sharing the pursuits of ordinary life.”

Latour was indeed old before his time. The years that had passed so lightly over Claire, had silvered his hair to perfect whiteness, had stamped the wrinkles of extreme old age upon his brow, and bent his slender

form as with the burden of a century. Yet he had lost little of his activity, and his mind was as clear and determined as ever, and Claire found it impossible to change his purpose.

After a prolonged discussion, he announced his determination to "repair damages," and arising, he drew Claire after him, and together they ascended to the scene of the late disaster.

By this time the room was clear of smoke, though there was still a nauseous taint in the atmosphere from the exploded chemicals; every pane of glass in the narrow windows was shattered; the fire in the furnace had been extinguished just in time to prevent the floor from burning, and two men were still actively at work clearing up the *débris* and making everything safe.

The chemical apparatus was a perfect wreck, and Latour ordered the whole to be removed at once. A few hours' work would, he declared, put the furnace in working order again, and with restored spirits he went down to make his toilette for the proposed drive to Paris.

As they sat together in the carriage, Claire told him of Andrew Courtnay's letter and its strange enclosure. He listened with a clouded brow, and when she had finished, said:

"It was very ill-judged in Courtnay to re-open that old wound. Thorne is nothing to you after the lapse of all these years; and although a kind of poetic justice might be attained in case of his wife's death, if you chose to strip him of the wealth for which he sacrificed you, still I think it will be better for your welfare here and hereafter, to have nothing to do with

that unprincipled man. Destroy the bond, Claire, and think no more of it."

A faint but very bitter smile curled her lip.

"It can do no harm to keep it, Armand. I may find a use for it in the future, though as long as my rival lives, of course I can do nothing with it."

"Then I can only hope that she may live to the age of Methusalah, or at least longer than you do. In the brilliant life I have given you, Claire, I thought all memory of that old bitterness was buried beneath the triumphs you have won. You are very precious to me, my dear, and it pains me to know that you still carry in your heart that fatal longing for revenge. Is it the course of our blood that we can never forgive nor forget?"

She slowly replied:

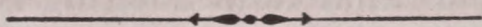
"Underlying all my gayety, running through all brightness of my life for the past ten years, was the dark thread of destiny that binds me to Walter Thorne. Something tells me that his wife will *not* live many more years, though I assure you I would do nothing to hasten her doom if I could. When she is gone I shall play the part of Nemesis to him. I could no more live without that hope than you can without your absorbing pursuit of that which, I fear, will never be won."

"If such are your feelings, it is useless to argue with you. I can only hope that a good providence will prolong the life of Walter Thorne's guardian angel till the last feeling of rancor has died out in your heart. Time is a wonderful teacher, Claire, and as the fire in your blood chills with advancing years, you will see how impotent we are to attain that which God emphatically forbade when he said, '*Vengeance is mine.*'"

“That may be, but God uses earthly instruments to work out his will, and to my hand will be delegated the task of punishing the treachery of which I was the victim.”

Nothing more was said till they reached the end of their drive, and Latour went at once upon the errand that brought him to town.

By the next evening the tower was again in readiness for new experiments, and they were commenced more vigorously than ever, though with no better success.



CHAPTER XI.

LATOUR'S DEATH.

AS time passed on, Claire almost forgot the existence of the bond which had re-awakened all her old resentment against the man she still persisted in calling her husband.

All the homage offered her had proved powerless to shake her determination to retain the shadowy relation she held toward him. It really seemed as if what she had said of herself was true—that her dead heart could never love again; for amid the throng of adorers that followed her steps and hung enchanted on her words, not one had been able to elicit more than a passing feeling of interest.

Even that she promptly repressed, for the purpose of her life always arose before her when she was, for an instant, tempted to abandon it. Her temperament

was elastic, and she had a passionate fondness for the pleasures of social life, but the vengeful taint in her blood only slumbered to be aroused at the slightest touch.

After the accident at Latour, the old life was resumed and flowed on as brilliantly and extravagantly as if no premonition of ruin loomed darkly before the actors in it.

After that conversation with her brother, Claire would have made some efforts at retrenchment, but Latour steadily refused to allow any innovation to be made, declaring that his wealth must soon become exhaustless, and while he possessed the means to keep up the state in which she lived, no change should be made.

Claire was forced to acquiesce, but she comforted herself with the thought that if the worst came, she possessed the means to rescue him from poverty.

Among her numerous admirers, but one had annoyed her with persistent efforts to win her. This was a Russian Baron reputed to be enormously wealthy, who for the last three years of her life had been the slave of her every caprice. Poliansky wooed in the Cossack style, and refused to be distanced or discouraged. He followed the object of his adoration everywhere—threatened vengeance against his rivals, and amused the fair coquette by his violence, though he did not win a high place in her good graces by the follies of which he was guilty on her account.

The Baron was no longer young, but he declared that *la belle* American was his first love, and win her he must and would. Claire laughed at his protestations—made herself merry with his peculiarities, and recom-

mended him to console himself by making love to her companion, who would have no objection to live in Russia. As to herself, she shivered at the mere thought of that cold and inhospitable climate, and nothing should induce her to trust herself in it.

One day Poliansky shrugged his shoulders and brusquely replied :

“The time for it will come, Madame. You love splendor—you cannot exist without excitement, and the day approaches in which you can command neither, except through a wealthy marriage. M. Latour’s furnace is devouring the last remnant of his fortune ; all the world knows that, and when it is gone you will listen to me.”

She flushed slightly and disdainfully replied :

“I have an ample settlement of my own, Baron, so I shall not be compelled to do violence to my feelings to retain the splendor you think I valued so highly. My poor brother’s delusion may only end with his ruin, but I have enough for both of us.”

Poliansky fixed his deep-set small blue eyes upon her face, and half contemptuously asked :

“What is such a bagatelle as thirty thousand francs a year to such a woman as you ? You can spend that in a month. Your friend has told me that such is your income, but as my wife, you may spend ten, twenty times as much, and your jewels shall rival those of crowned heads. My family diamonds are worth a fabulous sum, and for you, my queen of hearts, they shall be reset, and you shall yet shine in them at the court of the great Nicholas.”

“My dear Baron, cast that hope aside, for you will find it a vain one. I am half tempted to tell you a

secret that I have sacredly guarded ; from it you would learn that I cannot become your wife."

"If the confidence is to sever us, I do not wish to possess it, Madame. I will cling to my hopes ; I will trample on impossibilities to realize them."

"You had better be warned in time, and look elsewhere for one to share the magnificent destiny you offer me. I assure you that if it were ever possible for me to accept it, I should decline."

"Wait till you are reduced to your petty income, and find yourself compelled to resign the position in the world of fashion which you have so long held. Stars do not fall without losing their brilliancy, and you could never bear to be shorn of yours. The hand that can restore you to your proper place will be accepted at last."

Claire shook her head, laughed at this strange style of wooing, and said :

"Madame Laroche will suit you much better than I. She is still very handsome, and a most charming woman of society. Allow me to recommend her as my successor in your good graces."

"Madame Laroche is very charming—true—but who will look at the moon when the sun is shining? Ah, my beautiful coquette, you are laughing at me as usual ; but there is a proverb which says, 'he may laugh who wins.'"

"It is one you will not illustrate in this case, Monsieur. Some day I will tell you why, but not now."

"Ah, bah ; some day you will put your fair hand in mine, and smile like an angel in my face, as you sweetly say : 'Your adoring love has conquered at last, I am all your own.'"

“Really, Baron, you make love so earnestly that I am half tempted to believe all you say. But men are such deceivers, that it is risking too much to trust to their fair words.”

“I scarcely think that you possess the right to reproach my sex in that respect, Madame, for a more accomplished flirt than yourself can hardly be found in Europe. You have won the love of many, only to scorn it when offered. You have permitted me to follow you for years, giving gleams of hope that at times made me think the game was almost won, at others, I have been flouted like the rest of your adorers. But I do not give up as they do. Even in affairs of the heart, a strong will conquers in the end. Baroness Poliansky I have decided to make you, and you will yet bow to the fate I have decreed you.”

“I might think so if such a thing were possible; but it is not. I will tell you why at some future day. But here comes Leonie to break up our tête-à-tête.”

Madame Laroche came in to play the agreeable to the resolute wooer, who in spite of his devotion to Claire, she did not despair of bringing to her own feet when he found himself baffled in his present pursuit.

To Poliansky her own want of fortune would be no obstacle to their union, for he was rich enough to dispense with a dower with the wife he might choose. The wild Cossack was by no means insensible to the sweet flatteries lavished upon him by Madame Laroche, and if the beautiful syren who enslaved him could have been removed from comparison with her, Leonie's chances of ultimate success were not so very bad.

Nearly four years have passed away as a dream since that last remonstrance to Latour had been ventured

on, and now the tragic end of all his vain hopes was at hand.

It was autumn, and a golden October sun smiled over the landscape around the gloomy old tower to which for the past few months Latour had confined himself almost exclusively. His health had failed him, under his repeated disappointments ; and the wearing studies in which he spent so much of his time, vainly seeking to lift the shrouding veil from nature's most occult secrets, had exhausted his physical energies.

The chemist made many beautiful and valuable discoveries, but they were passed over with scarcely a thought in the absorbing desire that he believed always on the eve of fulfillment.

On this evening he was in the tower alone, preparing for what he knew was the last experiment he possessed the means to make. On the previous day Latour had withdrawn the last instalment of his fortune from the bank, and ceased to have any interest in it. He had made up his mind that if this supreme trial proved a failure like the others, he would keep his promise to Claire, and suffer the demon that possessed him to be laid at rest. Henceforth he could vegetate as a pensioner upon the fortune he had given her, and try once more to take an interest in the common pursuits of life. Yet the prospect of such a future was infinitely dreary to him who had lived in visionary dreams for so many years. He loved Claire very tenderly, but he knew that even she could not suffice to him for what he must give up in closing his beloved tower forever. If he were unsuccessful in this crowning effort, he must succumb, for he was firm in his determination not to risk any portion of her fortune in

the pursuit which had devoured the greater part of his own.

He had but paid to her the debt he owed his father, and he felt that he had no claim on what he had given her. Thus Latour reasoned with himself while he made most careful and elaborate preparations for the final struggle against the fate that menaced him.

He was but little over fifty, but a stranger would have declared the bent and feeble man who tremulously prepared for the final solution of the problem that had so long tantalized him, must have passed his grand climacteric. As he bent over the furnace to ascertain if it had attained the proper temperature, he looked like some weird enchanter about to commence his spells.

He paused once, made the sign of the cross upon his breast, and prayed fervently for success; yet, good Christian as Latour was, I am afraid if a demon had appeared at that crisis, and offered success in exchange for his soul, he would have made the compact, so utterly had he given himself up to the fantasy that had ruined health and fortune.

After hours of watching and waiting, the sublime moment approached which was to make him master of untold millions, or leave him a pauper.

The heated air in the chamber seemed to suffocate him, and he lifted the glass mask from his face an instant, to relieve the strain upon his breast and lungs. The next one, he fell partially unconscious upon the floor, overcome by the stifling atmosphere and the long pent-up feelings of his own heart. He made a feeble effort to rise, for he knew that everything depended on his strict attention to his duties; but he sank back with a feeble moan, muttering:

“Too late! too late! all is lost.”

There was a slight explosion, but the furnace roared on; and its master lay prone beside it, suffocated by the noxious fumes that filled the air. Had any one been near him to throw open the door and drag him forth as Claire had once done, Latour might have been saved; but a more kindly fate interposed, and gave immortality to the disappointed chemist, in place of the weary existence he must have dragged out through a few brief years, at best.

When the usual supper hour came round, and his master did not appear, old Pierre hobbled up the stairs to see if he had at last met any success. Receiving no answer when he knocked on the door, he tried to open it, but found that it was fastened within.

After repeated calls he became alarmed, and went back as fast as his infirmities permitted to the lower part of the house, and gave the alarm. In a few moments, an eager and excited group gathered on the platform, and after some consultation, it was decided to break open the door.

For a long time it resisted all their efforts, but finally burst in with a crash; and the stifling vapors confined within the chamber rushed out, causing the stoutest men among them to recoil.

Several moments elapsed before any one would venture in, and then the prostrate form of Latour was seen lying within a few feet of the furnace, which still roared on and sent forth volumes of heated air, which—alas!—no longer possessed the power to give warmth or vitality to the form, from which life had long since departed.

Again, Francois lifted him in his arms and carried

him below ; but, this time, all their efforts to restore him to consciousness proved vain. A messenger was dispatched to Paris, to inform Claire of her brother's condition and to bring back a physician, in the forlorn hope that something might yet be done for the stark figure that lay so still upon the bed on which it had been placed.

But Zolande would not cease her efforts to restore animation, and her lamentations over her dead foster child were most pathetic and heart-rending.

In two hours the family physician arrived, but a brief examination satisfied him that further efforts to restore life would be useless, though he found it very difficult to make the old housekeeper believe him.

Dr. Ledru gave orders to have the body of the deceased prepared for burial before the arrival of his sister, for he wished the evidences of the manner in which Latour had met his fate to be removed before Claire saw him. His clothing had been scorched, and his hair and beard singed by the heat from the furnace, though his person bore no disfiguring marks upon it. Latour had evidently died of asphyxia, and his face was as calm as if he lay in a natural sleep.

Dr. Ledru then descended to the tower to ascertain the cause of the catastrophe, if it were possible to do so. By this time the fire had burnt itself out, and over its dying embers he found the shattered remains of the last venture of the unfortunate dreamer—a broken crucible, with fragments of melted dross lying at the bottom, told the story of the pitiful failure which had engulfed both fortune and life. With a sigh he turned away, and slowly retraced his steps. As he gained the vestibule a carriage was driven

rapidly to the entrance; and in another moment, Claire, pale as death and trembling with excitement, came swiftly up the walk that led to the door.

When she saw Ledru, she hurriedly asked:

"What is it, Doctor? What has happened? My brother is not seriously injured, I hope. I could gain nothing positive from the stupid messenger. Oh, heavens! I have long dreaded this. Where is Armand? I must see him at once!"

"My dear Madame L'Epine," said Ledru, very gently, "come with me into this room. I must speak with you before you go to your brother—your presence can do him no good now."

She looked at him as if scarcely comprehending his words, but she submitted to be led into the music-room and placed on a sofa. Her companion brought her a glass of water, and after drinking a portion of it, she faintly asked:

"What have you to tell me, Doctor? Is he—is my brother—— Oh, no, no! it cannot be what I apprehend! so cruel a fate as that cannot have overtaken my good, my noble Armand. Speak, I conjure you, and tell me the worst."

After a moment's pause, Ledru gently said:

"It is better thus than to live to know that the aim of his life was defeated. God is often good to us when we least understand His dealings with the creatures he has made. Your brother will never meet with another disappointment, Madame; he has gone where all secrets are unveiled, and he now knows what he has so long sought in vain."

Claire bent down her head and wept with all the passion of her nature; but this first paroxysm passed

away, and she wiped away her tears, and with more calmness than Ledru expected, asked if she might be permitted to see her brother.

The physician went first to the room in which Latour lay, to see if his orders had been obeyed; in a few moments he returned, and taking the hand of Claire, led her to the couch on which all that remained of her brother lay.

The toilette of the dead had been carefully made, his hair and beard were trimmed, and Latour lay as if asleep, with a placid smile upon his lips.

Claire loved him deeply and truly, and she wept bitter tears of anguish over his sudden fate; but she admitted to herself, even in those hours of suffering, that death was better for him than the dreary insanity that must have fallen on him when compelled to relinquish the only pursuit that afforded him happiness.

She had been warned that day by her brother's partner that the last remnant of his fortune had been withdrawn from the bank on the previous day, and she knew, without being told, that he had perished in the hour of final failure, which blasted all his hopes and left him nothing to live for.

A few hours later she visited the tower, and saw for herself the evidences of that last supreme struggle with fate, and she scarcely marveled that so high strung a man as Armand Latour had succumbed before the certainty that he had risked all, and gained nothing but defeat.

Claire gave orders to have the room closed, after removing from the desk the few papers it contained. The lock was repaired, and the key placed in her own

possession, and from that day no one but herself was allowed to enter the sacred precincts of the spot on which her brother had toiled and died.

Madame Laroche joined her that night, and a few intimate friends came out to Latour, to remain till after the funeral was over.

On the fourth day after his decease, the unfortunate chemist was buried in Pere La Chaise, and Claire gratified herself by placing over his grave a magnificent monument recording his virtues and nobility of character.

When all was done, an inexpressible sense of weariness and desolation came over her. As little sympathy as there had been between her own pursuits and those of her brother, the tie that bound them together was a very strong one, and Claire felt as one might feel if suddenly abandoned upon a desert shore. She felt no desire to emerge from the seclusion of Latour, and that world in which she had shone as a bright particular star seemed to have lost all its attractions for her.

She finally roused herself from the depressing state of lassitude in which she had fallen, sufficiently to look into her brother's affairs. She was scarcely surprised to find that of the whole of his large fortune nothing remained but the settlement he had made upon herself. The house in town was sold to pay debts which had been contracted for its maintenance, but even that was insufficient to clear off the claims that came pouring in as soon as it was known that the estate was to be settled up.

These were so numerous that Claire was compelled to sacrifice a considerable portion of her own fortune

to liquidate them. She felt a just pride in doing this, for she could not have borne that the fair name her brother so highly prized should be dishonored through a failure to pay the last franc that was justly due from him to others.

Her lawyer remonstrated, but she was firm, and when all was finally settled she found herself the possessor of Latour, with an income greatly reduced from that she had hitherto enjoyed.

Though deeply chagrined at the change in their style of living, Madame Laroche remained in the seclusion of the chateau, in the hope that she might yet induce Claire to accept her Russian lover, or if that were impossible, secure him for herself.

The baron came constantly to Latour, but, under the plea of her recent affliction, Claire declined receiving him herself; but her companion was more complaisant, and, in their almost daily interviews, Leonie began to hope that she was slowly making her way to the great object of her life, a magnificent home, of which she would be the undisputed mistress.

Madame Laroche flattered, teased and coquetted with the Baron till he began to think her almost as charming as the object of his long pursuit. One day when they were walking in the grounds together, he made a singular proposal to her. It was to the effect that, if she would use all her influence to induce her friend to accept him, he would take her to Russia with them, allow her a handsome salary, and, in time, arrange a brilliant match for her, bestowing on her a suitable dower himself.

"And if I should fail, after using all my efforts in your behalf," she archly asked, "what is to compensate me for all my trouble?"

“Well—if that happens, I shall not care much what my fate is. I may as well marry you myself. You would do the honors of my castle in grand style, and make a sensation at court; for, next to Madame L’Epine, you are the most charming woman I know.”

She courtesied deeply, and laughed aloud.

“If your words mean anything, you are bound to me already, for Claire will never consent to marry you. In fact, there is an obstacle that she considers insuperable.”

“An obstacle?—what is it? She is free as air; and now that she is poor, she will listen more favorably to my suit.”

“I think not. Can I trust to your honor, Baron, a secret I have discovered for myself? If I tell you what the obstacle is, will you never betray it to a human being?”

“On my honor, no: I will be as silent as death itself.”

“Then let me whisper to you, in the strictest confidence, that Madame L’Epine’s husband is still living. You have always believed her to be a widow, but she is not one.”

Poliansky stopped, and looked at the speaker with a bewildered expression; but he presently said:

“If such a person is in existence, her long separation from him suffices to free her. But how is it that Monsieur L’Epine has never before been spoken of?”

“It was Claire’s wish that her unhappy story should not be known in this country. I heard it from a lady from Virginia with whom I met at Baden last summer. Mrs. Clinton brought letters to Claire from her early friends, the Courtneys; and she spoke to me of her

past life in the belief that I was aware of the facts. I was deeply interested, of course, and by putting together various items that I had learned myself, I made out the whole story."

"This is astounding! Does she yet care for the man who has so long deserted her? and is that why she refuses to accept the devotion I offer her?"

"I cannot tell you what her feelings to him may be, but she is a very rigid Catholic, and she will not believe that she is free to give her hand to another, though her husband obtained a divorce and married again."

"Why, what a dolt the man must be, to give up such an angel of beauty and fascination as Madame L'Epine! Was he mad?"

"I think not; but in those days Claire was poor and dependent. She knew little of the wealth her brother possessed; in fact, she was scarcely aware of his existence at all, till a few months before she came to France. When she was cast off by the man she had eloped with, Mrs. Courtnay received her again, and brought her to Europe with her. When her friend returned to Virginia, Claire remained with her brother, and induced him to present her to society as a widow."

"And she holds herself bound to that faithless villain! He too with another wife! She must be taught better than that, Madame."

"Well—let us make the effort, Baron. I will serve you in good faith, but, if I am unsuccessful, I shall claim the forfeit, remember."

She raised her brilliant black eyes to his face, sparkling with mirth at this strange wooing of two women

at the same time, but with a feeling of triumph that she had accomplished so much.

The Baron also laughed as he offered her his hand, and said :

“It is a compact, and I am flattered that you are willing to enter into it. If your friend proves obdurate, I will console myself with one I shall find infinitely charming when away from the enchantress who has so long held me in her chains. When I left home I told my friends that I should bring back with me a lovely wife, and I am now sure that I shall do so under any circumstances.”

On her return to the chateau Madame Laroche retired to her own apartment, to think over the singular interview in which she had just borne a part. She knew Poliansky to be a man of his word, and she balanced the advantages of securing him, against the prospect of a brilliant marriage with some other Russian magnate, if Claire could be induced to accept him.

Leonie had no personal preference for the Baron, though she was ready to assume the state of his wife ; so, secure to win either way, she decided to do what was in her power to further his suit with her friend.

Day by day she talked of the Baron's many excellent traits to Claire : dwelt on his long devotion to her, and made her almost believe that it was her duty to escape from the dull life she led, and the privations of a narrow income, to the magnificent future offered her by her Cossack lover.

At first Claire listened wearily : for the first few months after her brother's death she was so much depressed in spirits that she cared little for the loss of the profuse splendor in which she had so long revelled.

But gradually her taste for society began to revive, and she realized that she had lost the brilliant supremacy in the court of fashion which had so long been conceded her. She keenly felt the inconveniences of her lessened income: it would barely suffice to maintain Latour respectably, and all thoughts of an establishment in Paris must be given up, even if she would consent to live humbly where she had so long reigned as the queen in her own circle.

Her life at that period seemed to have no object, and for the first time she despaired of ever being in a position to extort justice from Walter Thorne. Her conscience, too, began faintly to prick her for watching and waiting for the death of poor Agnes, that she might wreak her vengeance upon her offending husband.

In this state of feeling she began insensibly to listen with more complacency to the praises of her wealthy lover—to think of the almost oriental splendor in which she might live if she accepted him. With all his brusqueness, the Baron was not distasteful to her, though she felt not one emotion of preference for him.

"What does that matter?" she asked herself. "My heart is dead—it can never love again; but I can make him happy, for the man adores me—I believe that *he*, at least, is sincere in his professions."

Claire was hesitating thus, unable to make up her mind to the irrevocable step, when a package of American newspapers was brought out to her by the Baron, unconscious that in doing so he was destroying his last hope of success.

On looking over them, Claire found something in one of them that caused her to grow very pale and

then flush deeply. She cut the paragraph from the paper, and put it carefully away with the bond sent her four years before by Andrew Courtney.

She then went out on the terrace and paced to and fro, thinking over the long-buried past, and planning the course she intended to pursue. When she retired at a late hour she could not sleep, for old memories were seething in her brain and again half-maddening the heart that had so long learned to beat as quietly and coolly as if her life had been one long summer dream.

It was very late when Claire appeared the next morning, and she learned that the baron had been out and returned to Paris, leaving with Madame Laroche a communication for herself. As soon as breakfast was over, she plunged into it at once.

The baron has received an imperial summons to return to St. Petersburg within a month from this time, and he presses for a final answer from you, my dear. I promised to obtain it, if possible: he wishes to take his wife back with him to Russia."

Claire laughed, and said:

"But Leonie, who knows what he is recalled for? It may be to send him in exile to Siberia. Would it not be risking too much to say yes, under such circumstances?"

"I don't believe you care the least about him, Claire, or you could not laugh when you utter such a supposition. But the imperial order for his return is not to punish, but to reward. The baron is a secret agent of his government, and his services are so highly appreciated that the emperor intends to confer on him the order of the Black Eagle, and give him a

higher title of nobility. He will be elevated to the rank of prince, and an estate, with any number of serfs, given him to sustain it. Only think what a great destiny is before you—Madame La Princesse, I congratulate you !”

Claire quietly replied :

“ All that sounds very grand, but I must decline sharing the honors of his new Highness. *My* fate calls me elsewhere, and in a few more weeks I shall be on my way to my native land.”

Her companion regarded her with amazement mingled with triumph. She asked :

“ Are you really in earnest, Claire ? I began to think that you were seriously considering the baron’s offer, and might finally accept it.”

“ I have considered it, and I have decided against it. I can never love him ; that should be enough for him. Something I learned yesterday has caused me to make up my mind to return to the United States for at least a year. I cannot explain what it was, Leonie, but you must make the baron understand that, with me, all hope for him is at an end. I only wish that you would console him for his disappointment. While I am gone, you can remain at Latour, if you choose ; but it would be far more agreeable to shine in the court of the Czar than to vegetate here alone.”

“ Have you irrevocably decided against accepting the baron, Claire ? ” was the earnest question of Madame Laroche.

“ Positively, and without appeal. This very day I shall commence my preparations for departure, and within a month I shall be on the ocean.”

Her friend steadily regarded her a moment, and then burst into a merry laugh :

"Thank you, my dear, for the offer of Latour, but I think I shall prefer accepting your suggestion, and go to Russia with the baron. I hope that you will bear witness to him that I have been his faithful ally; that I have used all my efforts to induce you to listen favorably to his suit, for on that hangs my chance to secure this brilliant match."

Claire regarded her with astonishment. She coldly said :

"You *have* advocated the baron's cause zealously enough, but I am at a loss to understand you."

"And to speak frankly, I am equally at a loss to find words to explain our anomalous position. The baron is a semi-barbarian after all, but I like him well enough to put up with him, in consideration of the state to which he can elevate me. He likes me next to you, and as his friends expect him to take back with him an accomplished foreign wife, he is willing to put up with me if he can't get you. There—it is out now."

Claire looked amazed, indignant, but she finally burst into a peal of ringing laughter.

"What an absurd position for all of us, and what a cool pair you must be. He has actually been making love to you, when I thought he was so devoted to me that he would be plunged in despair when I finally broke with him."

"He might have been, if I had not flattered him till he finds me almost necessary to him. I never believed that you would marry him, so I played my own game, and I shall reign in state over his vassals. I shall not invite you to visit me, Claire, much as I am attached to you, for he might go back to his old allegiance, you know. Only when I have him entirely to myself, can

I secure the power I intend to wield over this wild Cossack. I hope you are quite satisfied with this arrangement, my dear?"

"Perfectly; and I wish you joy with the burden you are about to assume, for it will be no trifle to keep this semi-barbarian in proper order," said Claire, merrily. 'I have often told the baron that you would suit him far better than I should, and I am glad that he has had the wisdom to see it at last. We have dwelt together very harmoniously, Leonie, but I shall have no wish to see the barbaric splendor in which you will live. Win the heart of your husband, and keep it, for I shall have enough to occupy me in the distant land to which I am going. This ending of the farce we have played is as agreeable to me as to you, I assure you."

"You are the dearest creature in the world, Claire," said Madame Laroche, embracing her with effusion.

"All I now ask of you is, to insist that my marriage shall take place immediately. I must secure my prize before I can feel certain of my good fortune."

"You shall do so, and I shall be your attendant on the auspicious occasion. This is a better ending to a grand passion than the French resource of blowing one's brains out; but I must say that it gives new edge to my contempt for men's vows of eternal constancy. 'What care I how fair she be, if she is not fair to me,' is the baron's motto, I suppose, and I recognize its wisdom. So, hey for the wedding."

In the afternoon the baron came to hear the decision of his fate. With some chagrin he received it from Claire's own lips, but he did not resent it. He only shrugged his shoulders, and submitted to the inevitable. She excused herself for a few moments,

but presently returned, leading Madame Laroche by the hand, and with a gay smile, said :

“I bring you the fair consoler for your disappointment with regard to myself, Baron. Leonie will render you far happier than I ever could, and I ask but one favor of you : that is, that your marriage shall be celebrated within ten days. At the end of that time I shall embark for New York.”

For an instant Poliansky looked foolish and annoyed, but the comedy of the situation struck the three, and they burst into a simultaneous peal of laughter.

After that, all the embarrassment was over, and the preliminaries of the intended marriage were speedily settled.

The baron went back to Paris to set the lawyers to work to prepare the handsome settlement he intended to make upon his bride. A magnificent trousseau was ordered by him to be ready within a week, and by making extraordinary efforts, the mantua-makers and milliners succeeded in having it completed by the appointed time.

On the tenth morning from the announcement of the engagement, the marriage took place in Notre Dame, and on the following day Baron Poliansky and his bride bade adieu to their friends and set out for Russia.

In the meantime, Claire steadily made her preparations for departure. Pierre and Zolande had been amply provided for by an annuity settled on them before the death of Latour, and they were left in charge of the chateau during the absence of its mistress.

Six months had elapsed since the death of her

brother, and after making a farewell pilgrimage to his tomb, Claire set out for Havre alone, for she did not wish to be embarrassed by the espionage of a servant.

She had permitted Finette to accompany the Baroness Poliansky to her new home; the girl had served her long and faithfully, and she regretted the necessity that parted them, but under present circumstances, she thought it best to rid herself of her altogether.

What Claire's designs were, and how she carried them out, will be seen as our story progresses.

That lonely voyage, haunted only by phantoms from the long-buried past, was a dreary penance to her, but she consoled herself for all its discomforts by anticipating the success of her long cherished vengeance.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST HOUR OF AGNES.

MANY improvements have been made in the outward appearance of Thornhill during the years which have elapsed since we last looked upon it. A taste for landscape gardening was one of the few that survived the blight which had fallen on its unhappy mistress, and her husband permitted her to indulge it without interference.

A grove of oak and tulip trees swept away from the entrance on either side, in curved lines, leaving the wide central space in front of the house to be ornamented at the will of Agnes. The hill side had been cut into a succession of wide terraces, covered with the

softest and greenest turf, and planted at the edges with scarlet verberna, which, in the season of bloom, formed a brilliant contrast to its emerald setting. On the esplanade in front of the portico a few silver maples were grouped together in such a way as to shade the lawn, without materially obstructing the view from the windows of the house.

A graveled carriage sweep, shaded by lofty forest trees, lay below the terraced portion of the grounds, and wound gradually upward to a side entrance which gave into a lateral hall. This was nearly as imposing as the main one, and was chiefly used by visitors to the house.

The place was considered by Walter Thorne's neighbors the most desirable one in the vicinity of L——, but not one among them would have been found willing to accept his beautiful home with the burden of guilt and wretchedness which its possession had entailed on its owner.

Lovely as were the surroundings of Thornhill, few looked up at its stately walls without a shudder when they thought of the earthly pandemonium they were asserted to contain, though few could speak from actual knowledge. The family had for years held themselves aloof from those who lived near them; the failing health of the mistress of the mansion being the excuse for the seclusion in which they lived. Stories were told of the cause of that broken health, which made people look askance at Walter Thorne, and marvel if they could be true.

He took no pains to contradict them, or to set himself right with those he came in contact with as seldom as possible. He lived, when at home, in his library

and studio, seeking the society of none, and brusquely repelling all attempts to penetrate the haughty reserve in which he chose to shroud himself. When he felt the need of social intercourse, he sought it in large cities, in which he was lost in the crowd, and was not an especial mark for comment or notice.

Thorne would often absent himself for months at a time, leaving his wife and daughter in the seclusion of the dull home he no longer found supportable to himself. That his absence was regretted no one believed, for the husband and wife were known to be entirely estranged from each other, and peace at least reigned in the house when the fiery spirit that ruled it was away.

Seventeen years have rolled away since the inauspicious marriage of Agnes Willard and Walter Thorne, years of bitter dissension, which had destroyed the sweetness of her nature and more deeply embittered his; but to her, the end of this wretched turmoil was now approaching—the shining angel was hovering over her, waiting to take her to that repose which she had failed to find on earth. But for one tender tie, Mrs. Thorne would have rejoiced in the prospect of release; but the dying one wept and trembled, as her fading sight dwelt upon her daughter, a gentle dependent creature, who clung to her as her only friend.

The shadows of evening were creeping through the lofty room, and the pale invalid, supported by pillows, held the hand of her child clasped closely in her own. Few who looked on Agnes would have recognized the proud beauty whose strong will had marred her own destiny and that of the man she had once so wildly loved—for whom she had now neither trust nor affection. A

pallid phantom, whose light blue eyes glittered with the fierce passions her wretched life had brought into constant action, was all that remained of the fair loveliness of her who had once borne the name of the Lily of L——.

The daughter, a girl of sixteen, did not resemble her in person or in temper; she was a pale delicate creature, with eyes of vivid blackness, and hair of the same color, which was wound in voluminous folds around her small head. Petite, pretty and graceful, few would have supposed her capable of resistance to anything demanded of her, but the fire of her paternal race only slumbered to be aroused into action in time of need, to enable her to defend herself from wrong or oppression.

Dr. Brandon, Mrs. Thorne's physician, had left the room to inform her husband of the approaching crisis, as Agnes wished once more to see him before the end came.

When the door closed on him, the dying mother raised her feeble hand, and placing it on the bowed head of the trembling girl, softly said :

"I am going from you, May, my darling. I can no longer stand between you and your father and guard you from his outbursts of temper. When I am no longer with you, he may be good to you, for I do not think all feeling is dead within him; but you must not be placed entirely in his power. The money left me by my father was settled on my children. You are my only child, and to you it must descend. Should efforts hereafter be made to induce you to relinquish the control of your little fortune, remember that it is my last injunction to you to retain it at all hazards. Promise me this, my daughter, or I cannot die contented."

"Oh, mamma," sobbed May, "do not talk of leaving me all alone. I cannot bear it. What will become of me when you are gone?"

Mrs. Thorne feebly drew her toward herself, and tenderly said:

"I must speak of what must so soon happen, May. I feel already the hand of Death laid coldly upon me; a few more hours, and I shall be away—away in the spirit land; but before I take leave of time, I must have the promise I require. I could not rest in my grave if I left you at the mercy of the man it has been my misfortune to claim as my husband. Promise me that you will retain the independence I bequeath you—that nothing shall induce you to surrender it to your father. He will demand it of you, for he will wish to possess the entire control of your future fate. But you must not—you dare not—give him a power he will be certain to abuse."

Appalled by the earnestness of the speaker, May tremulously said:

"I will promise anything you wish, mamma, if you will not so dreadfully excite yourself. You are exhausting your strength speaking so much."

"What matters that now? I am floating away on the wings of invisible spirits—they sustain me in this supreme hour: they whisper of hope and peace in a better land. I shall find it there, though I have missed it here, for I have a firm reliance on the mercy of God to the erring and unfortunate creatures He has made. My child, I have no time to lose; there is my bible—take it in your hand and swear to me to obey my wishes, and I shall be better contented to leave you."

Almost beside herself with grief and terror, May lifted the holy book, pressed it to her lips, and gave the promise her mother so earnestly required. Mrs. Thorne sunk back with a faint smile on her wan lips, and whispered :

“ Thank you, my love ; kiss me ; lay my head upon your breast, and so let my spirit pass to Him who gave it. I have been a miserable sinner ; I have done much wrong in my life, but I feel the assurance that the All Father will forgive and receive me.”

May gave her some drops left by the physician, which seemed to revive her, and then placing herself upon the side of the bed, rested the worn face upon her bosom. She wept softly, and felt in that hour all the forlorn misery of her lot in the approaching separation. Her mother was the only creature who had ever loved or caressed her, and she was leaving her to struggle with all the difficulties of her position, aggravated by the opposition to her father to which May had just pledged herself.

In the meantime, Dr. Brandon had made his way to the private sanctum of Mr. Thorne, and struck a quick knock upon the door. It was immediately opened by a tall, slender man of dark complexion, with eyes of vivid blackness, and features clearly and finely cut. It was a haughty and handsome face, and might have belonged to an Italian aristocrat in the days of the Borgias. The mouth was shaded by a heavy moustache which concealed the cynical expression it had gradually acquired, and the eyes held depths of smoldering passion, of dark unquiet fire, that blazed forth at the slightest provocation. Such was Walter Thorne at the mature age of forty. Time had dealt more

lightly with him than with his wife, for his fine physical organization enabled him to bear, without loss of health or spirits, the domestic misery which had broken down Agnes, and was bringing her to an untimely grave.

He coldly bowed to the physician and said :

“If you have anything to say to me, Dr. Brandon, I will go with you to the reception room. My den is all in confusion, for I have been overhauling some old pictures that have been packed away for an age. Pray excuse me for not inviting you to come in.”

“Dr. Brandon drew back and briefly said :

“I have not the time to enter, Mr. Thorne. I came hither to summon you to your wife’s side. She is sinking very fast, and I scarcely think she will be alive an hour hence. If you wish to see her while consciousness remains, you had better come at once to her apartment.”

The listener shivered, and a deathly pallor overspread his face, but he recovered himself and calmly inquired :

“Are you sure that Mrs. Thorne is dying? You know you have thought that several times before, and she revived to new life. Unless there is really a necessity for it, I should prefer not going to her room just now.”

The doctor curtly replied :

“There can be no mistake this time, Mr. Thorne. The chain you have dragged so long and wearily is about to be snapped forever ; in a few more hours you will be free.”

Thorne flashed a lightning glance upon the speaker, but suddenly his expression changed—he seemed to

be struggling for breath, and waving back the physician, he hurriedly said, as he closed the door upon him :

“ I will come to her in ten minutes.”

The room was fitted up as a studio, and artistic taste, combined with lavish expenditure, had made it a gem of beauty, which no one was permitted to enjoy but himself. No profane foot was ever allowed to cross that enchanted threshold, within which Walter Thorne found the only happiness he enjoyed in his own house.

A passionate lover of art, he had collected around himself copies of the most celebrated cabinet pictures of ancient and modern times, and the walls from ceiling to floor were literally covered with them. Marbles, white and pure, the work of the best sculptors of our day, gleamed in the niches between the windows, and were grouped in different parts of the large room.

A bay window had been thrown out on the southern side of the apartment, and in the recess his easel was so placed that on raising his eyes from his work they commanded a wide prospect of hill and valley, with a narrow stream winding through the grounds of his own domain.

A table covered with a scarlet cloth stood in the centre of the floor, on which books and music were scattered, for Mr. Thorne was a connoisseur in more arts than one.

An iron-bound chest was open on the floor, from which an old portfolio filled with unfinished sketches of mountain scenery had been taken, and it now lay open upon the table ; other pictures in different stages of progress were heaped up on the floor, but in the bottom of the chest one still remained.

This one was wrapped around with several folds of linen which had grown yellow with time; for many years had elapsed since the painting was placed there as a banned thing—too sacred or too dangerous to be lightly looked on.

He sunk down beside the chest; with heaving breast and dilating eyes he lifted the canvas, tore away the shrouding folds that veiled it, and with panting breath, cried out:

“At last, *at last*, I am free to look upon that haunting face again. Free, *free*! Oh, God, can it be true that my long thralldom is about to end? That the chain which has eaten into my very heart is about to be broken? Come forth to the light once more, shade of my early love, and let me look upon thee once again. Let me curse the weakness that severed us forever—making me a slave to the will of another, a tyrant to that unhappy one who is making ready to carry her wrongs to a higher tribunal than that of earth. If they have been many and hard to bear, I too, have had my bitter burden, and it was heavier than hers. Yes, heavier, for *she* loved me once, and I—I almost detested her as the cause of my bitter anguish.”

Thus muttering, with a species of frenzied haste Thorne drew aside the last fold, and placed the picture against a pile of books that lay upon the table. The broad level light from the uncurtained window fell upon the portrait of a girl so young as to seem almost a child. It was but a sketch, and only the upper portion of the face was finished, but the outline was so beautiful that it might easily have been mistaken for an ideal head.

But Walter Thorne knew better than that, for his own hand had sketched it from the fair original in those hours of youthful passion in which he had thought the world well lost for her sake. Long and weary years had passed away since it had been hidden from his sight—years of strife, of heart-burning, of wretched discontent, which had embittered his fierce temper; and hardened his nature.

Thorne could not have told what had impelled him to seek that picture on that day, but now he dimly felt that some mysterious prevision warned him that his long bondage was almost ended, and the right restored to him to look upon the shadow that so vividly evoked the past, and brought before him the image of the one love of his passionate and erring heart. He knew that he had been a bad husband, but he had some excuse to himself in the circumstances of his marriage; he had refused hitherto to look upon Claire's picture, lest he should break away from the ties that bound him, and seek his own freedom at the price of such respectability as yet remained to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

FREE AT LAST.

THORNE'S burning eyes devoured the features so long hidden away, and he passionately cried:

"Oh, my love, my life, my cruelly-treated darling, where are you now? What has been your fate through all these years of darkness and estrangement? Have you

given your heart to another? Have you grown hard, and cold, and ceased to remember the lover of your youth?—the unworthy one who gave you up, even while you clung to him in such wild abandonment as led you to prefer death to life without him? Ah, no! while *I* live, you dare not give yourself to another: your faith forbids it, and I thank Heaven for that.”

A sudden feeling of shame seemed to come over him, and he thrust the portrait aside, and covered it from his sight.

“Not yet, not yet,” he muttered, as he remembered his dying wife, and strongly compressing his lips, he passed through the door, locking it behind him, and moved with light steps towards the furthest wing of the house, in which the apartment of Agnes was situated.

Dr. Brandon had returned to his patient, and on hearing Thorne’s approach, he came out, and said:

“Ah, it is you at last. Mrs. Thorne is ready to see you, and she wishes to speak with you with no other witness than her daughter.”

Thorne bowed coldly, and passed into the apartment. He glanced keenly at the pale face that lay upon the breast of his daughter, and saw that the physician had spoken truly. Death was in it, and his heart gave a great bound as he thought:

“I shall, indeed, soon be free, but at what possible cost to myself. With her life passes my title to my own estate, if Andrew Courtney chooses to press the claim he has on me. Yet, why should I fear about that? It was transferred, no doubt, to Claire, as it was won for her benefit. I will seek her, make my peace with her at any cost, and then—well, then, we

may regain the faint shadow of the happiness we once enjoyed with each other."

As these thoughts rushed rapidly through his mind, he came to the bedside, sat down on a chair that was placed near it, and in measured tones said :

"You wished to see me, Mrs. Thorne. Can I do anything for you?"

She turned her eyes on him, and with some bitterness, replied :

"I sent for you that you may see for yourself how near you are to the release for which you have so ardently yearned. You have often told me that the only thing I could do to please you would be to die, and restore to you the freedom of which I had conspired with your father to deprive you."

"Agnes, do not let us bandy reproaches now," he more gently said. "Death condones all wrongs, and mine against you have also been great. I am a resentful man, and I have said and done many things that if I were not my father's son, I might repent of."

"It is true, Walter," went on Mrs. Thorne, as if scarcely heeding his words, "that I hurried you into our most unhappy union, but in those days I loved you beyond expression, and I was mad enough to believe that my passion must in time win its reward. I did not understand your nature, and I have been bitterly punished for the wrong I did you. I found that I only inspired disgust where I hoped for love; but all that is past and gone, and it is vain to recur to it. Beneath your hardness, all that was soft and gentle in my nature soon perished, and I gave back taunt for taunt—bitterness for bitterness."

Agnes paused, exhausted by speaking, and with proud sternness, he replied :

"Then why refer to it now, Mrs. Thorne? We agreed to disagree; that tells the whole story. I am not a better man for the experience through which I have passed with you; but in this hour let us exchange forgiveness; it is all that is left for us now."

"Yes, all," was the faint response. "I sent for you not to speak of myself, but of my daughter. Forget that she is my child; think of her only as yours, and try to be kind to her when I am gone. I have done what I could for her, but now she will be alone, and I entreat that you will be a tender and considerate father to her."

Thorne glanced towards the bowed head of May, and slowly said:

"I cannot imagine why you should deem this charge necessary, Agnes. So long as my daughter is obedient to my wishes, I shall do for her all that she can reasonably expect. I hope that assurance satisfies you."

Mrs. Thorne sighed heavily, and closed her eyes a few moments: her lips moved as if in prayer, and then, with sudden strength, she raised herself from her reclining position, and with feverish energy, replied:

"And is that all you will say to me even in this supreme hour? Yet why should I have hoped for more from *you*? You hate me to that degree, that you shrink from your own child because she is also mine. Well, be it so, Walter Thorne, but retribution is preparing for you. With the clear vision sometimes vouchsafed to the dying, I see the future unrolling as a scroll before me, and I see that in your turn, you will be tortured by an unrequited affection. You will love to madness a woman who will only give you the ashes of the dead heart consumed by your own

treachery. I know that you will again seek my rival, and she—yes, she, will avenge me. She promised it to me long ago, and she is not one to forget a pledge she has once given. But *she* will have no love for my poor May, and my darling will be cast out from her home, from her inheritance. I see it all. I can comprehend the workings of destiny in this solemn hour, and they will be fatal to the only object of my care.”

The words sunk into passionate sobs, and she fell back exhausted on the breast of the weeping girl.

With sombre haughtiness her husband replied :

“It seems to me, Agnes, that you but seek to open a gulf between my daughter and myself. Why will you attempt, in these last moments of your life, to implant in her mind distrust of me? I am her protector, her only refuge, and to me she may surely trust to render her future safe and happy. As to your previsions, they are but hallucinations in which I have no faith. Claire I have never heard from since the day she left Ada Digby’s protection, and if I were inclined to seek her, I should not know where she is to be found. If I could find her, I would *compel* her to return to me, and renew the vows that were so cruelly broken. I will not deny to you that I shall seek such happiness as I may now find. I have fasted for it long enough, and my heart is hungry for the sympathy and companionship it could not find in my union with you. If I *could* find that wronged one, I would seek her through the world, and try to make her forget how bitterly I injured her; but I have little hope of being able to do so now. Seventeen years of silence have woven about her a pall of darkness and forgetfulness which it will now be impossible to penetrate; even if

I succeeded in finding her, she might refuse to forgive me for the wrongs of the past."

Mrs. Thorne muttered with failing breath—

"No—she will not forgive—she will not avenge——"

Her voice sunk away in a long drawn breath, and May uttered a cry of anguish.

"Oh, papa, she is dying! Will you not speak a word of kindness to her in her last moments?"

Her father arose, and gloomily looked down on the pale face on which the shadows of death were rapidly setting. He took the nerveless hand in his own, and with a faint touch of feeling, said:

I forgive you, Agnes, for the bitter past. If I am hard, remember that you have made me so; do not die exulting in the belief that you divine for me a future more intolerable than my life with you has been."

She feebly muttered:

"I do not exult in it; but it will come to you. Remember my words, and go on to their fulfillment; that is all I have to say. Kiss me, May, and remember my last command."

Her daughter bent over her, but her lips met those of the dead; with her last words life had passed away, and the poor girl sank fainting upon the pillow.

With a faint feeling of compunction, Thorne stood a moment silently gazing upon the dead and the living, and then rang for assistance. May was borne to her own apartment, and the attention she required given her by the housekeeper. Dr. Brandon came in, and after examining his patient, declared life to be extinct.

With proud composure, Walter Thorne stood by; and with a hard feeling of exultation he learned that the clog which had so long fettered him was removed.

He looked down at the dead face of the wife he had despised and tortured, but few remorseful regrets arose in his breast. He felt as a man from whose life a crushing weight had suddenly been lifted; and he was not disposed to take up a new burden in the moment of his long wished-for release. He calmly gave such orders as were necessary, for he would not affect a grief he did not feel. Indeed, scrutinizing eyes looked upon him to ascertain if he did not feel exultation in the event of the day. But his conduct was strictly decorous, and as soon as possible he retired to the privacy of his own apartments, into which no one ventured to follow him.

Thorne did not again uncover that haunting face. Some feeling, scarcely comprehensible to himself, withheld him from doing so, though he could not prevent his thoughts from wandering to that long-buried past, and living over in fancy that rapturous dream of love and romance.

Such men as he love with desperation, hate with a bitterness unknown to tamer souls, and she who was just gone had only possessed the power to arouse the tiger in his nature. Even at the last, when he could have made an effort to be gentle with her, the estrangement between them made itself cruelly felt, and he had found it impossible to be otherwise than cold and hard, even when she was passing away forever.

He scarcely thought of his daughter at all, he only resented the little confidence his wife evidently had in him as the guardian of her child's future happiness, when he recalled the last words of Agnes, and marveled of what nature that command was to which she had referred. He half savagely muttered:

"It was something to place May in opposition to me—I understand that very well. But china does not do well to come in contact with iron, as her mother would have taught her if she had been wise. Well, well, we shall see soon enough now."

The funeral took place in due time, and a large concourse of people came to see Mrs. Thorne laid in the family burying ground, and to make such observations on the state of affairs at Thornhill as were possible.

They only saw a sombre, stern man, who went through the ceremonial with all proper outward respect for the dead wife whose heart he was accused of having broken, and a pale, drooping girl shrouded in crape and bombazine, who shrank with nervous shyness from the expressions of sympathy that were addressed to her.

No one ventured to offer condolences to Mr. Thorne, for his relations toward the departed were too well known to induce his neighbors to believe that they would be well received.

The ordinary routine of life at Thornhill was scarcely interrupted by the decease of the mistress of the establishment, for she had so long been an invalid that no one looked to her for orders. A competent house-keeper had for years been in charge of the establishment, and no one missed the unhappy lady save that desolate girl who looked out from her lonely room with the dreary consciousness that she was bereft of the only heart that ever loved her.

CHAPTER XIV.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

NOW that his wife was gone, Walter Thorne, with some uneasiness, recalled the words of Courtney—that, while she lived, no claim to the large sum he had lost to him at the gaming table would be put forward. He believed that Claire had instigated that unusual proceeding, and that to her would be given the power to ruin him, if she wished to proceed to extremes.

But Thorne did not feel much uneasiness on that score; he flattered himself that if he could meet her again face to face, he could disarm her resentment and bring her back to his arms as loving, if less confiding, than in those early days of passionate enchantment.

But to whom should he apply to inform him of all that had befallen her through these long years of silence and estrangement? He suspected that Ada Digby could give him the information he so much desired to possess, for he felt convinced that a straggling correspondence was still kept up by her with the former object of her care; but he had quarreled with Miss Digby two years before, because he thought she too openly espoused the cause of his wife against himself, and no communication was held between Thornhill and the cottage.

At present, she was absent from home; and if his pride would have stooped to apply to her for the information he wanted, his impatience to learn something definite would not permit him to await her

return. Thorne had held no communication with Courtnay since that night, in Washington, four years before; but, shortly after the decease of his wife, he addressed him the following letter:

“THORNHILL, March 2d, 18—.

“MR. COURTNAY—Sir: I shall not leave you to learn from the public prints that the wife in whose existence my title to your forbearance lay, is dead. It is now two weeks since she was buried, and I am naturally anxious to know what effect her decease will have upon my fortune.

“In my madness on that fatal night, I lost a sum which will cover the entire value of my estate, handsome as it is; and if you now press for payment, I must reduce myself to penury, or become dishonored by refusing to pay a debt which *gentlemen* regard as more binding than those secured by law. Of course, the last resource will be impossible to me, and but one other means of settlement remains.

“I have reflected deeply on the singular compact you made with me, and I can come to but one conclusion, and that is, that my first wife is the party to be benefited by this transaction. If Claire proposed to herself to gain power over me in this way and bring me back to my old allegiance to herself, it was a *ruse* unworthy of her and quite unnecessary.

“Now that I am free to express my true feelings and there is no one to dictate to me the course of action I must pursue, I find but one desire in my heart—that is, to reclaim my repudiated wife, and endeavor to atone to her for the suffering I most unwillingly inflicted upon her. You, who have always been the

master of your own actions, can scarcely understand the force of the pressure brought to bear on me in those youthful days in which I was held under the iron rule of a father who never swerved from a decision he had once made.

“The wrong I committed against Claire was to marry her at all, knowing as I did the inflexible will I had to contend with; but I was so infatuated that I hoped for impossibilities, and I used most questionable means to obtain her consent to an elopement.

“I do not defend what followed. I was literally *forced* to give her up, or to bring her to poverty. I purchased my father's forgiveness by accepting the wife he had chosen for me, but no happiness sprang from that union. It is ended now, and I am once more free to return to the object around whom all my tenderest thoughts have clustered, even while another claimed me as her husband.

“Claire refused to recognize the validity of the legal decision which freed us both, and therefore I believe she is still as much my wife as she considered herself in the days of our early separation. I do not wish to present myself before her as one possessing any right over her, but I shall be glad to know where she at present resides, that I may seek her and endeavor to win forgiveness for that past which I was powerless to control. I know that I grievously sinned against her, but I was also sinned against myself, and she is not the Claire of old, if she refuses to take that into consideration.

“I have never dared inquire concerning her, lest I should break from the bonds that bound me and seek her in defiance of all. I know that she went to France

with your mother, and remained with her half-brother, but beyond that all is darkness. Pray, write without delay, and inform me of her whereabouts, and also enlighten me as to what I am to expect with reference to the bond you hold against me.

“Respectfully, W. THORNE.”

After an interval of ten days, a reply came—brief, and to the point:

THE GRANGE, March 7th, 18—.

“MR. THORNE: Permit me to say to you, in reply to yours of the 2d, that the bond to which you refer is no longer in my possession. What use the party to whom it was transferred will choose to make of it, I cannot say. The death of your wife was to be the signal for action, and I have no power to retard it.

“As to Claire, I do not think that any concessions will avail to obtain her forgiveness for the past, and therefore I decline giving you her address.

“Respectfully, ANDREW COURTNEY.”

Walter Thorne read this curt reply with a sardonic curl of his lip, but he grew pale as he thought of possible consequences to himself. His next thought was, how he should pay off the debt if the claim were presented. In the last four years, he had saved a considerable sum from his annual income; and the settlement of his wife, if he could gain the control of it, would enable him at least, to stave off ruin.

He had not yet examined her papers, but, under the spur of his present excitement, he went in search of her desk and brought it to the library for examination.

In that she had probably left some clue to the disposition of her property. Under the circumstances, it may be imagined with what feelings he found and read the following letter addressed to himself:

“JANUARY 20th, 18—.

“WALTER: I write to you what I could not tell you without a scene of angry recrimination, which I am unable to bear in my present state of health.

“You are aware that the money left to me by my father was placed in the hands of a trustee for the benefit of myself. Under the settlement, I have the right to dispose of it as I please, and I have left it to my daughter to do with as she chooses from the day of my death; but I shall exact from her a promise to retain the control of her little fortune, and I request you to refrain from attempting to wrest from her what I have given her.

“I foresee for my poor child a hard and cruel lot. You do not love her—you will probably soon seek to marry her to some one chosen by yourself, that you may free your house from her unwelcome presence. If she refuses obedience you will cast her off, and May will have nothing to save her from poverty but the sum of fifteen thousand dollars which I have bequeathed to her.

“Allow her to retain it in peace, I entreat. Do not make her life unhappy by persecuting her to break the promise I shall obtain from her. You will not succeed, for she is true to her word, and she will not recede from what she has pledged herself to do.

“My poor child would love you, Walter, if she had any encouragement to do so; when I am gone, draw

her nearer to your heart, and try to make up to her for the loss she will so keenly feel. Deprived of the only heart on which she has been permitted to lean, she will need consolation; she will be left alone in the world, with no one to turn to but you. Oh, Walter, think of this and be kind to her.

“If you would lay aside your resentment toward Ada Digby, and ask her to come to Thornhill as a companion for May, I should feel more willing to leave her. Think of this, and if you *can* gain your own consent to comply with this last request from her who would have been a true and loving wife to you, had you not crushed out every spark of affection by your own indifference or something worse.

“AGNES THORNE.”

Walter Thorne read over these lines with a frowning brow, and angry heart. They did not appeal to his better feelings, as their writer had hoped. The antagonism between himself and the wife who had been forced on his acceptance survived even beyond the grave, and with a suppressed oath he muttered:

“Ada Digby, indeed! She shall never come beneath my roof to sustain my daughter in rebellion against me; to sit up in judgment on me, as she is so fond of doing. So that is settled.”

With a portentous frown he gathered up the scattered papers, restored them to the desk from which they had been taken, and sharply rang the bell. When a servant came he abruptly said:

“Inform Miss Thorne that I wish to see her in this room.”

In a few moments May entered, looking pale and

agitated, for such a summons was an unusual thing, and she feared that something unpleasant was about to happen. Thorne pointed to a chair, and brusquely said :

“ I have been looking over your mother’s papers, and among them I have found a letter addressed to myself. In it she asks me to give you my affectionate care, as if she had supposed me such a monster as to withhold it, if it is deserved. She has placed you in opposition to me on purpose to produce estrangement between us, and I have sent for you to see if you value my affection sufficiently to make a sacrifice to retain it.”

May sunk down upon the seat and endeavored to stifle the rapid pulsations of her heart at this abrupt address. She feared her father much more than she loved him, but she possessed a power of resistance he had not calculated on. She tremulously replied :

“ I would do much to gain your approbation, papa, but I hoped you would spare me any contest with regard to the last wishes of my mother. They are sacred to me, sir, and I dare not disobey them.”

“ So-o—you are ready to assert your independence of me, are you ? but I will yet break you to my will, and show you, as I did her that is gone, that I am master of your fate.”

“ I promise to do my best to please you, papa ; you need have no fear that I shall prove a disobedient daughter to you, even if I do refuse to violate the promise I gave my poor mother when she lay dying ; for of course you refer to that.”

He angrily said :

“ There is but one thing you can do to prove that you understand your duty to me, and that is to comply

with the demand I now make to surrender the management of your money to me. I shall waste no words on you—I *require* you to do this.”

May placed her hand over her palpitating heart, and for a few moments the words that formed themselves upon her lips refused to come forth. Her father’s stern eyes were fixed upon her, and she shrank before their fiery light. At length she faltered :

“I have every confidence in you, papa, but it is impossible for me to violate the promise I made to the dead. I dare not, even if I incur your displeasure by refusing to do so. I am your daughter, sir ; I understand my duty toward you, and the possession of a few thousands will not induce me to play the part of a rebellious child. Have confidence in me, and respect the feeling that dictates opposition to your will.”

“Confidence ! I can have none in the prudence of a girl of your age. It is an insult to *me* that you are in a measure placed beyond my control. Your mother acted thus because she wished to produce dissension between us ; there could have been no other motive for such a proceeding. Your beggarly pittance is of small importance to a man of my fortune ; but it is enough to become a snare for you—to render you an object of speculation to some needy spendthrift, who may marry you for this money, knowing that with your hand he can gain possession of it. It is that I wish to guard you against.”

May recalled what her mother had said on this very subject, and her determination was strengthened to be firm in her refusal to comply with her father’s demands. She gently but decidedly said :

“It is very painful to me to refuse what you ask,

papa ; but I cannot break the pledge I gave to my mother in her last moments. If you will be gentle and kind with me, you shall have no cause to complain of me, although I do retain the right to the undisputed possession of her legacy."

"Am I to understand that you refuse? absolutely and positively refuse?"

She bent her head in assent, and Thorne started from his seat and paced the floor rapidly for many moments. May trembled in the anticipation of a violent outburst of passion, such as she had often witnessed between himself and her mother; but angry as he was, her father controlled the torrent of furious words that were ready to burst from his lips. He saw how much the poor girl had suffered, for she looked scarcely able to be out of her bed, and he also felt the assurance that if she possessed any portion of his spirit she would not submit to be trampled on.

Thorne thought it best to try other means to subdue her to his will, and he at length stopped in front of her, and in measured tones said:

"There is but one way left to protect you from the dangers I foresee for you. Until you have acceded to my demand, I will seclude you from society; you shall live here alone under the strict watch of Mrs. Benson, for I can trust her to play the part of the duenna. You shall visit no one—receive no guests. Our neighbors do not trouble themselves much about us, but if any of them should call, I shall order them to be refused admittance. You will go nowhere but to church, and not even there, unless the housekeeper can accompany you. We shall see how you will bear this enforced solitude, for I am going away in a few days, to

be absent I do not know how long. If you repent of your obstinacy and yield to my demand, I will take you to some fashionable place of resort this summer, and give you such advantages as my only child should enjoy. If not, you can remain immured here till I find some one to take you off my hands."

May bowed her head and faintly said :

"I must submit to your will, sir, though it will be cruel to leave me here with no society at all. Mrs. Benson is not an educated woman, and she is no companion for me. I venture to entreat that you will ask my cousin, Ada Digby, to come to me. She is the only person who would be willing to do so for my mother's sake ; and in my present state of feeling her society will be more congenial to me than that of younger persons."

"I dare say," he scornfully replied. "But it is not my object to give you a *congenial* companion. Besides, Ada Digby is the last person I would voluntarily ask to come to my house as an inmate. She is a meddling person, who takes it on herself to give her opinion on subjects that do not concern her. You may give up the hope of having *her* for your friend, for I will never tolerate her presence near me. If you find the life to which I condemn you intolerable, all you have to do to change it is to notify me of your willingness to comply with the terms I just now stated."

"Oh, papa ! I shall die in this solitude !" exclaimed May. "If my cousin is not permitted to come to me, I entreat that you will place me in a good boarding-school where I can complete my imperfect education."

"And have a notification sent to me from the principal in a few months, that you have eloped with some

popinjay," he sardonically replied. "No, thank you, Miss Thorne; I shall not place you in the way of such a temptation as that. To allow you to go forth into the world on any terms would defeat the object I have in view. Your education is certainly not what it should be, but if I find you unmanageable, I shall employ a private teacher who will be in my interests. I will hold the disposal of your fate in my own hands, in spite of the efforts made by your mother to place it beyond my control."

"Oh, papa! my mother had no such intention, nor have I a thought that is in opposition to you. Only love me—only be kind to your poor desolate child, and I will do all that is possible to please you."

Mr. Thorne inflexibly replied:

"I ask but one thing of you. Grant that and there will be no cause of disagreement between us. The absurd settlement made by your dead mother should not stand in opposition to the will of your living father."

May clasped her hands over her brow, and mentally asked for strength to combat this iron will. The father sat silently watching her, believing that she was about to yield; but, after a struggle for composure, she firmly replied:

"I cannot do what you ask, sir. Remorse would haunt me if I complied with your demand. I find myself placed in a cruel position, but I must do what I believe to be right."

Finding her so unyielding, Thorne's anger burst forth in a torrent of bitter words which he could no longer repress. He forgot all she had lately borne, or was reckless of it, for Walter Thorne never restrained

the expression of his rage when it mastered him. The pale girl put up her hand in a deprecating manner, but he heeded her not, and as she attempted to rise from her seat she sunk nearly insensible at his feet.

He almost spurned her from him, as he contemptuously exclaimed :

“Puling, sentimental fool ! with no strength either of body or mind ! It is enough to turn a man’s brain to have two such women to deal with as this girl and her mother. I am rid of one, thank Heaven ! and I’ll find some one to take the other off my hands as soon as possible.”

His daughter had sunk down from weakness and exhaustion, but her senses had not entirely deserted her, and she heard and comprehended his cruel words. She made an effort to raise herself, and Thorne furiously rang the bell.

A servant answered it so promptly as to induce the belief that she had been hovering somewhere in the vicinity of the library. He pointed to May, and sternly said :

“Assist Miss Thorne to her room, and tell Mrs. Benson that I wish to see her here immediately.”

The girl offered her hand to her young mistress, and aided her to rise. May turned her agitated face toward her father, and her white lips moved as if trying to syllable words, but the imperious domestic autocrat haughtily said :

“Go to your apartment, and remain there. I wish to hear nothing more from you at present ; nor will you see me again while I remain here, unless you bend your stubborn will to mine.”

A faint gleam of color came into her pallid face, and

the flash of the dark eyes raised to his own for a single instant showed him that a feeling of resistance was aroused in that helpless girl which he would find it very difficult to conquer. May closed her lips firmly, and walked without assistance toward the door.

As it closed on her, her father muttered :

“ There was a flash of the Thorne spirit, but it won't do with me. That rebellious girl shall yet find that I am her master. I almost wish I had said nothing on the subject, vital as the possession of this money is to me just now ; but, as I have laid down the law, she must abide the consequences, if she refuses to succumb. The men of my race have never allowed women to rule them.”

The Thornes, of Thornhill, had indeed been an imperious race : they had been known in the State since its first settlement by William Penn. The founder of the family was the younger son of a wealthy English gentleman ; and, with the money he brought with him to the colonies, he purchased large tracts of land from the Indians, which, in time, became very valuable. He married a young French girl whose parents escaped from the Huguenot persecutions in their native land, and found an asylum in Maryland.

Basil Thorne left an only son to inherit his large estate, and when that son was gathered to his fathers, two children divided the paternal inheritance. The daughter married and removed with her husband to South Carolina ; and her brother remained on the paternal acres as the representative of his family. He led a fast and dissipated life, and, when he died, his widow and son were left with the mere wreck of his magnificent fortune. The mother was a woman of

strong sense and great pride. She saw in her young son the germs of talent, and she sacrificed her remaining resources to afford him a thorough education. He repaid her by his devotion to study, and afterward by his diligence in the profession she had chosen for him. The elder Walter Thorne became a distinguished and successful lawyer; regained a large portion of the patrimony his father had squandered; and shortly after his marriage with a penniless Spanish girl, he re-built the family residence in handsome style. His wife died in the second year of their union, leaving one son, the haughty, obstinate and imperious man, who, like his ancestors, would not permit himself to be thwarted with impunity, or forgive the person who had crossed his path.

The musings of Thorne on this family history were interrupted by a tap upon the door; the next instant it opened, and a stout, middle-aged woman, with some pretensions to beauty, came in. She smiled, courtesied, and her employer pointed to a chair, and said:

“Sit down, if you please, Mrs. Benson; I wish to speak with you on business.”

The housekeeper spread out her black skirts, simpered, and prepared to listen to what he had to say. She was a sharp, inquisitive-looking woman, with small black eyes and a turned-up nose: her mouth had a disagreeable expression, but the lips were red and full, and her complexion still fair and blooming. Mrs. Benson's dress was always scrupulously neat; and, in her own department, she was an unrivalled manager. She fully understood her own value, and stood very little in awe of the man who made all the rest of his household tremble before him.

Finding that Mr. Thorne did not speak at once, Mrs. Benson demurely said :

“ I hopes, sir, that nothing ain't gone wrong in which I am discerned. I have tried to please you to the very best of my debility, Mr. Thorne.”

The housekeeper's abuse of language was too familiar to him to elicit a smile, though the heavy frown faded from his brow, and he lightly replied :

“ You are a jewel of a manager, Mrs. Benson, and I am perfectly satisfied with all you have done. I summoned you hither to show you the perfect confidence I have in you, by entrusting you with the control of my daughter during my absence. I shall be away some time, and I wish you to keep a strict watch over May every day of her life.”

The woman looked surprised. She said : “ I'm ready to do whatever you remand, sir, but I hardly think Miss May will remit to have me put over her.”

“ Of course you are ready to obey my orders, let them concern whom they may ; and it is you who are not to remit your vigilant care over your charge while I am gone. Miss Thorne and myself have had a misunderstanding, which will prove rather a serious thing for her, unless she comes to her proper senses, and is made to understand that I am the arbiter of her destiny. I shall leave Thornhill to-morrow for an indefinite period, and I commit my daughter to your especial charge. She is not to see any one except the old German who gives her lessons in music and drawing. I do not wish visitors to be admitted, if any should come ; and May is not to go beyond the grounds on any pretext, except to church ; nor is she to go there, unaccompanied by you. I wish you to understand

that, on such occasions, you are to keep your eyes open, and allow her to speak with no one."

Mrs. Benson stretched her small eyes very wide, and blurted out, "She ain't thinking of falling in love with nobody, I hope, sir; ef she ain't, it's curus that you are so pertickler all to onct. I ain't hearn tell o' anybody comin' here arter her, though she's a nice-looking young lady, and a great heiress, too."

Thorne bit his lips, and haughtily said:

"That may or may not be, Mrs. Benson. If my daughter had proved herself worthy of my confidence, she would certainly have had a sufficient fortune from me; but, as matters stand at present, I scarcely think she will ever inherit Thornhill. My property is my own, to dispose of as I please, and it will certainly not descend to the child who has placed herself in opposition to my wishes. I desire that others shall also understand this; I do not choose to have fortune-hunters coming in pursuit of Miss Thorne. Her mother has left her something—but, little as it is, it may tempt persons of that class, and May is yet very young and inexperienced. It is to guard her from making an unsuitable match, that I leave her under your strict charge. I shall hold you responsible for her; you are not to lose sight of her when she walks out; you are an active woman, and can take as much exercise as she is likely to desire. I hope you understand me, Mrs. Benson; I will make it worth while to you to play the part of Cerberus while I am away."

He took out his pocket-book, and laid before her a note of considerable value. The black eyes of the housekeeper twinkled with greed, and her fat hand closed on the bribe as she diffidently said:

“Many thanks, sir, for your renifcence ; but I don’t perzactly know what a Cerbus is. Ef you’ll tell me, I’ll try to be it, I’m sure.”

Thorne laughed at this, and lightly said :

“Well, Madame Malaprop, Cerberus was a particularly sharp watch-dog, whose services were important to the ancient of days. I wish you to be as watchful, and as faithful as he was said to be, and I shall have no cause of complaint against you.”

“I’m sure I shan’t give you none, sir ; but I don’t know how Miss May will stand it. She ain’t fond o’ me no how, and I’m afeard she’ll run restiff if I am set to watch her, though in course I’ll do my best, sir, to keep her from harm ; she’ll think her dignitude is put on some, I guess, sir, she’ll begin to stand on it.”

“Miss Thorne understands from me that you are to be responsible for her. I have issued my orders to her, and I scarcely think she will attempt to disobey them ; you need not regard her dignity ; all you have to do is to maintain your own, and from my knowledge of you I think you will be perfectly able to do that. Perfect seclusion is what I desire for my daughter. She is to be made to feel that she is held a prisoner in these grounds, and never to be permitted to go beyond them unwatched until she has yielded to the demand I made of her this morning. What that demand was is no concern of yours ; all you have to do is to be faithful to the trust I have reposed in you, and earn a pretty addition to your salary by exercising your vigilance while I am away. I believe you now fully understand what is required of you ?”

“Yes, sir, I think I do. I will keep Miss May all

right and safe till you come back to Thornhill ; but I hopes, sir, that you'll not be long away."

"My return is uncertain, but you will write to me regularly, sending my letters to Washington to the old address. The gloom of this place oppresses me—I must have a change. But whenever I do come back, Mrs. Benson, it will be to inaugurate a new style of life here. I have lived as a hermit long enough, and some day I shall throw open my doors and fill the house with company. Your position will hardly be a sine-cure then, eh, Mrs. Benson ? "

"So much the better, sir ; 'taint no sin to love company, an' I aint naterally fond of solertude. I'd rather take the trouble to git up a dinner for twenty people than to sit down to the table gloom like with only two or three. But discuse me, sir, I don't mean to insinuate nothin' agin my way of life here. I've saved money in your service, Mr. Thorne, an' I've had a good time in this house, since I've lived in it a managin' of all its consarns myself."

"I am glad to hear that you are satisfied, Mrs. Benson, and it will be your own fault if you do not have a better time in the days that are coming."

The housekeeper flushed slightly, and wondered what the last words meant : but Thorne did not notice her embarrassment, and calmly went on :

"But for the gossip of the people of the neighborhood I would bring my friends around me at once, and make the old place as gay as it used to be in my father's best days. But that will not answer here so soon after the death of my wife. I must keep up appearances, you know."

"Oh, as to that, sir, so rich a gentleman as you can

do what he pleases ; you needn't care about other people's palaver. It won't come to nothin' arter all ; it's only spent breath you know, sir, an' you aint the person to care for that. I'd do jest as I chose, and never mind other folks' gab. I never thought you did care for it much afore."

"Well, the truth is, I don't care as much for the *vox populi* as I ought," he replied with a laugh, "but I expected you to be the last one to advise me to disregard such things, Mrs. Benson."

He often took a mischievous pleasure in puzzling the housekeeper by using such words as she could not comprehend, but nothing daunted she said :

"If you only give grand entertainments, Mr. Thorne, you will always be in the popular box ; and as to the countenances of the people, you'll soon see 'em brighten up, an' look smiling enough when they sit down to one of your fine dinners, or suppers ; an' it's me that will do my best to keep up the credit of the house."

"I don't doubt it, Mrs. Benson ; and when the new *regime* is established, you shall have *carte blanche* as to the expense."

Mrs. Benson pondered a moment over his meaning, but she would not appear ignorant, and she finally said ; "If you should bring a whole team in a cart, sir, there will be no need of getting blankets to cover them. That expense won't be necessary, for we have plenty of bedclothes, and to spare."

"So much the better, Mrs. Benson ; and now having said all that is necessary, I will give you your *conge*."

"Thank you, kindly, sir ; whatever you are willing to give me, I will thankfully accept," and the house-

keeper arose and courtesied, comprehending the motion of his hand toward the door as a signal for her to retire, though profoundly mystified as to what he proposed to give her.

“Something handsome, I dare say,” she thought, as she left the room, “for Mr. Thorne is a liberal gentleman, in spite of his strange ways an’ the hard words he is so fond of using. I wish my education hadn’t been so poor; I h’aint much book larnin’, but I’ve made the most o’ my opportunities, an’ I don’t lack sense. What *could* he have meant by saying ’twould be my own fault ef I didn’t have a better time in this house than I’ve had afore? I’m not a bad-looking woman, and he wants a good manager for his house. Who knows what may happen? for Mr. Thorne’s known to be so bad tempered that it wouldn’t be eesy for him to find another wife among the high-flyers he belongs to. *I* ain’t afeard on him, an’ ef I’m cute enough, mebbe I may be mistress here in place of housekeeper one of these days. It’s worth trying for, anyhow; an’ *I* wouldn’t be put down like that poor sickly creetur was that’s jest gone.”

Indulging in these fallacious hopes, Mrs. Benson carefully put away the money her employer had given her, and hastened to order for dinner such things as she knew he particularly liked. Many a man has been won, she well knew, by attention to his physical comfort, and she began to hope that the master of Thornhill might prove one of that class, though hitherto she had had little reason to think so.

Thorne was abstemious in his habits except in the use of wine, and he cared little what was provided for him if it was properly prepared and handsomely served.

As May was forbidden to leave her chamber for the present, the scheming housekeeper had the field to herself; she presided at the supper table, and poured out the fragrant tea, but she felt rather crest-fallen to observe that Mr. Thorne was too much absorbed in his own thoughts to be conscious of the exquisite flavor of the viands she had assisted to prepare with her own fair hands.

He did not speak a word during the repast, and left her alone as soon as he had satisfied his appetite. She consoled herself for this by reflecting that he was annoyed by the conduct of his daughter, and again deluded herself with anticipations of what might be.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW DEVELOPMENT.

WALTER THORNE did not again attempt to see his daughter before his departure, but he left for her a few brief lines informing her that when she had made up her mind to render him the obedience he had a right to demand, she could write to him, and Mrs. Benson would forward her letter. Until then, he had no wish to receive any communication from her.

Thus coldly and harshly did he leave the poor girl to the solitude of that desolate house. Romantic, tender, capable of loving deeply and truly, May found herself in the first flush of youth, shut out from all that is most ardently desired in the budding spring time of life.

As the weeks passed on, so dreadful did the tedium of her life become, that if she had dared, she would have sacrificed her little fortune to gain a release from it; but when she was tempted to do so, the face of her dying mother arose before her with its expression of pale earnestness, and she shrank from violating the pledge she had given, as if from a sacrilege.

Miss Thorne saw no one save the domestics of the family, and an old gray-haired German who came out twice a week to give her a music lesson; Mr. Herber was so stupid, and so much wrapped up in his profession, that he could talk on no other subject; but uninteresting as he was, even his visits came to be looked forward to by the lonely girl as an agreeable diversion to the monotony of her weary life.

Weeks lapsed into months, and still there was no intimation from her father of any intention to return to Thornhill. No communication had passed between them, though May was aware that at regular intervals the housekeeper wrote to Mr. Thorne, and received a few lines in reply, containing directions as to the management of the place; but he rarely referred to his daughter in any way.

The solitary girl would not make a companion of Mrs. Benson, for her pretentious ignorance was too distasteful to her; besides, May soon suspected that she was placed as a spy over her. She could not leave the house without finding her on her steps, but she avenged herself on the fat housekeeper by walking far and fast, in the hope that she would repent of the part she had undertaken to perform, and give up her annoying surveillance.

May did not like Mrs. Benson, but she was always

polite to her, and her pride prevented her from remonstrating against her watchfulness. If her father chose to subject her to such indignity, she must bear it, but she would make no sign by which her duenna could discover how much she resented her forced companionship. But her heart grew bitter and hardened towards the parent who treated her in so shameful a manner, and she thought herself justified in taking any measure that would free her from his tyranny.

May thought many times of writing to Miss Digby to entreat her to receive her beneath her roof; if consent was given, she would elope from her dreary prison, and never return to it unless brought back by force. But she remembered that she was not of age, and she felt certain that her father would reclaim her at all hazards; so that avenue of escape closed before her, and she sunk into that state of apathy in which nothing gives pleasure.

Music, for which she had great taste, jarred on her nerves; books became a weariness, and the long exhausting walks she daily took were only tolerable because they fatigued her to that degree that sleep came as a blessing and wrapped her in forgetfulness for many hours after they were over.

In this dearth of social enjoyment the solitary girl eagerly read such newspapers as came to the house. Mr. Thorne subscribed for several of the leading journals of New York and Philadelphia, and reading them seemed, in some way, to link her with the active, stirring crowds in which she so ardently longed to enter, that she might seek and find the companionship and sympathy denied her in her own home.

When the news of the day was exhausted May read

the advertisements, because they gave her an idea of the busy, bustling life beyond her retreat. One column in the city papers afforded her most vivid interest. It was that in which advertisements addressed to lost or absent ones is found, and she pondered over them for hours, constructing fanciful romances from such hints as they afforded.

One day, in looking over the paper, she found the following lines :

“ A lonely heart seeks companionship. The writer of this is young—not ill-looking ; he possesses wherewithal to make life a fairy scene of enchantment, but, alas ! he is painfully shy, and cannot make the first advances, unless some encouragement is given him beforehand. Fair Eve, who is destined to become the minister of happiness to your lonely Adam, pray send a response to this appeal, and it will be joyfully received, and promptly responded to. Address A. R., box No. —, Philadelphia.”

May smiled over this singular appeal, and wondered if the writer expected anything to come of it ; but the opening words struck an answering chord in her heart, and she read it again and again, each time trying to picture the appearance of the writer more vividly to her fancy.

There was one point of sympathy between them, at least ; he was lonely in heart, and who could understand that better than the neglected daughter of Walter Thorne ? May kept that paper on her table, and day after day she read the advertisement, till an interest in its writer was aroused which the dull sameness of her outer life only deepened and intensified.

At length she was tempted to reply to him. Perhaps he was the knight who would break her bonds, and give her the freedom she so ardently panted for. He was not one of the fortune-hunters against whom her father had warned her, for he already possessed sufficient means of his own; and it never occurred to the inexperienced girl that the writer of the advertisement could deliberately intend to deceive her who in good faith would reply to him.

The craving want of sympathy and companionship is the only excuse I can offer for her; but the imprudent step which might have sealed her unhappiness for life, led to an acquaintance with one who proved himself worthy of the affection he won, though that person was not the writer of the appeal which had so deeply interested her.

The advertisement inserted in the paper had been written in a frolic by a young law student in Philadelphia, that he might amuse himself with the replies he received. He had no idea of anything beyond that; for, except that he was young, Alfred Ransom was the reverse of all he had represented himself. Vanity might have induced him to believe that he was not ill-looking—but he was short, stout and dark, with coarse features, and ill-made hands and feet. A more unpromising hero for a romance could scarcely have been found; nor did he possess the means he had referred to, as his allowance from his father barely sufficed to afford him a meager maintenance while pursuing his studies.

Ransom sat in his dingy room beside a table covered with letters, all of which had been sent in reply to his advertisement, and he was laughing like a madman

over some of them, when an application for admittance was made at his door. He shouted to the visitor to come in, and a slender, fair young man entered, bringing with him several books.

“Ah, it’s you, Sinclair; you’re just in time, old fellow; come here and have some fun. Such a lot of stuff as that advertisement of mine has showered on me is perfectly astounding. Women must be precious guys to believe in such chaff as a matrimonial advertisement.”

The young man thus addressed came forward and stood beside the table with an expression on his fair and honest face that was easily deciphered. It was one of disapprobation verging on disgust. He was a very pleasing-looking person, with a bright, candid face, clear, dark-blue eyes, and a quantity of soft brown hair thrown back from a broad, intellectual brow. In a tone of reproof, he said:

“How can you amuse yourself in so questionable a manner, Ransom? Many of the women who wrote those replies were no more in earnest than you are; but a few among them may have been, and if so you have much to answer for.”

“Stuff! don’t begin to lecture, old sobersides, for I’m in no humor to listen. My life was beginning to stagnate, and I must find something to amuse me—I can’t afford to be extravagant, so I’ve played the sentimental. Here’s one who tells me she has gushing sensibilities, a heart tuned to all the tender emotions, and all that gammon. Read them yourself, Harry, and see what prime fun it is to have such lots of love made to such a looking fellow as I am.”

Sinclair smiled faintly, but shook his head.

"I tried to dissuade you from this folly, Albert, but you would not listen to me. I do not wish to read any of the replies elicited by your false appeal to public sympathy. As to your looks, they are good enough to win you a wife when you are able to take one."

"Are they? I'm glad to hear that, though I protest that my glass does not flatter me to the same extent. You need not have any scruples about looking over these precious effusions, for I don't suppose their writers were verdant enough to put their true names to them. By Jupiter! I am wrong though, for here is one that seems to mean more than the others, and the name at the end is one I know very well too. Ah, if that advertisement had only told the truth, what a happy man I might be. Look—you will read this, Harry, for it was written by one of the sweetest little budding women in the land."

Ransom thrust between the eyes of his companion a rose-tinted billet, which exhaled a delicate perfume. It was open, and Sinclair saw the name at the bottom of the page—"May Thorne."

He smiled faintly as he pointed to the signature, and said:

"I should say that was the most fanciful name selected by any of your fair correspondents."

"But it is a real name, and I have seen the girl that bears it. It is not long ago, either: I was in L—— attending to some business for my father a month ago, as you already know. While there, I went to church, and saw the writer of this letter under the convoy of a regular she-dragon.

"A guardianship she seems to need," was the dry response.

“But wait till you know all that I can tell you. May Thorne is barely sixteen—she knows nothing of life, and she is allowed no opportunity to mingle with young persons of her own age. Her mother died last winter, and she has been shut up at Thornhill—that is, not exactly shut up, for she can walk in the grounds around the place, and they are quite extensive; but she isn’t allowed to see any company, nor to go out without having that fat old housekeeper trudging after her. Her father is a tyrant, who goes off to seek his own pleasure, leaving her so much alone that I hardly wonder at the poor thing being touched by my lying advertisement. Just read the few lines she has ventured to write: I declare, they make me feel that you were right, after all, Harry, to dissuade me from such a piece of villainy.”

He thrust the paper in Sinclair’s hand, and he involuntarily glanced over the contents. The words were simple enough, but they evidently came from the heart of the writer, and they touched that of the reader. He slowly said:

“It was very imprudent in her to write this, but she must be very honest-hearted herself to believe your statements, and reply to them in good faith. What you have told me is some excuse for her, however; but why should her father act so harshly toward her?”

“Because he’s afraid some man will snap her up who is on the lookout for an heiress. Mr. Thorne has taken pains to let it be known that she will not inherit his estate, but she has a few thousands from her mother that he thinks might tempt some needy adventurer to make love to her. If she hadn’t a dime, she is sweet enough and pretty enough to attract any man.

If I was only as handsome a fellow as you are now, after this romantic commencement, I might go in and win; but she is too refined and delicate to fancy such a rough-looking Caliban as I am."

"What is Miss Thorne's style?" asked Sinclair, with a feeling of interest he could not repress.

"Just your opposite, Harry. She is fairy-like, with black hair, and eyes that are like stars. She isn't a great beauty, and she is pretty and graceful. I declare I feel as mean as if I had done her a great wrong."

"Don't take it too much to heart, Alfred: no harm will be done unless you reply to her letter and entrap her into a correspondence that will mean nothing."

"I'll never do that. I'll tear it up, but I shall keep the others to have my own fun over."

He held out his hand for the missive, but Sinclair smiled and said:

"Allow me to keep it, Al.; I am interested in what you have told me about its writer, and when I go to L—— to attend the circuit court next month, I shall try to see her. What church does she attend?"

"The Episcopal Chapel on —— street; you may keep the note if you choose, but if you were to seek her acquaintance, her father would give you a rebuff. He would be sure to class a poor lawyer among the fortune-seekers."

"No man can be called poor who has brains, education, and a willingness to work," said Sinclair, in reply. "As Miss Thorne is not to inherit her father's wealth, the few thousands you spoke of could scarcely influence a man deserving of the name, to make her his wife. I do not know that I shall attempt to approach her at all, so let us dismiss the subject. Here

are the books you wanted, and I hope you will make such good use of them as to make sure of your license at the close of the present term."

CHAPTER XVI.

MAY GETS AN ANSWER.

THE two young men introduced in the last chapter, were connected by marriage: Sinclair's aunt was the stepmother of Ransom, and they were thus thrown into association. But for that, the high-toned and refined nature of the elder man would have shrunk from intimate contact with the younger one. Sinclair used his influence as far as possible to keep his erratic friend within due bounds, but Ransom would not always listen to his advice. He now insisted on keeping the numerous letters he had received, to be laughed over among his particular set, and his friend allowed him to do so in consideration of the scented billet he had rescued from the man to whom it should never have been addressed.

Alone in his own room, Sinclair took it out, and with envious interest examined every line of the delicate and lady-like writing. The faint scent of violets still lingered around the paper, and as he inhaled it, the graceful form of the fair writer arose before his fancy in the girlish beauty and simplicity Ransom had described. He was fascinated by it, he could not have explained why, and he soon began to feel a yearning desire to look on the lonely creature who had taken so

equivocal a step in the hope that one human heart would become interested in her forlorn fate. The note contained these words :

“ One lonely heart may respond to another. I have borne the burden of solitude so long that I am weary of it, and I know how to sympathize with another in the same position.

“ I am young, but I shall tell you nothing more. If you are in earnest, we can meet at a future day, and when we stand face to face, we shall know if fate has designed us for each other. In the mean time it will break the monotony of my life to correspond with you, and I can receive your letters under cover to Nancy Bean at L——.

MAY THORNE.”

Sinclair read these lines over until he knew them by heart, and then carefully put them away in his pocket-book, with the vague intention of replying to them if the outward semblance of their writer should please his fastidious taste. He was a young man of fair prospects, fine talents and great ambition to win a distinguished position in the profession he had chosen ; but he had very little fortune.

That, however, afforded him small annoyance at present, for he confided in his own industry and ability to win not only competence, but wealth, in the career that was opening before him. He stood alone in the world, for the aunt to whom I have before referred was the only relative he possessed. His family was respectable, and his father, a man of high principle and stern integrity, had lived long enough to impress his own characteristics upon his son.

Young, handsome, gifted with a graceful address that prepossessed all with whom he was thrown in contact, there was no bar to Sinclair's success in life, and he looked forward with the buoyant consciousness that in himself he held resources that ensured it, if life and health were only granted him. To make a home for himself—to surround the woman of his choice with comforts and luxuries purchased by the fruits of his own labor, was his dream; but who that Egeria was to be he had not yet discovered, for he had been too busy preparing himself for the career he meant to run to think of falling in love.

He went to L—— to attend court, for he already had a fair share of business for a young practitioner. He arrived in the town on Saturday evening, and the next morning, after a careful toilette, sought the church in which Miss Thorne worshiped. He had induced Ransom to describe to him the exact situation of the pew belonging to the Thorne family, and by going at an early hour he obtained a seat which commanded a view of it.

The bell had scarcely ceased ringing when a fat, over-dressed woman entered it, followed by a young girl in deep mourning. After bowing her face upon the prayer desk a few moments, she raised her head and threw back the heavy crape veil that shrouded her features. Sinclair was more struck by her refined style of beauty than Ransom had been: *he* did not think her merely pretty, for the marble purity of her complexion, the dark liquid eyes and perfect regularity of her features, entitled her to higher praise, he thought.

As the congregation gathered, May looked around with the naïve curiosity and interest of a child, but

when the clergyman ascended the pulpit, and, at the close of the voluntary, uttered the sublime words, "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him," she opened her prayer-book and became absorbed in the service. At its close she gave her undivided attention to the preacher, though the watchful observer saw that the fair face gradually lost its expression of rapt devotion, and one of weariness and unutterable sadness crept over it.

Sinclair went back to the hotel thinking more of the isolated girl he had so closely observed than of the truths he had heard expounded by a speaker noted for his eloquence. Two strangers who sat near him at the dinner table were freely discussing Walter Thorne and his affairs, and the young man could not avoid overhearing them. One of them said :

"It is scarcely three months since Thorne's wife died, and he has consoled himself already. They say he is in pursuit of a rich wife. I dare say he needs money, for they say that he has lost large sums at the gaming-table, and I have heard it whispered that the reason he shuts his daughter up at Thornhill is to punish her for withholding from him the few thousands her mother left her. I only hope she'll not let him get possession of them, for he'd scatter them fast enough, and in the end he might leave her unprovided for."

"I saw her in church to-day," replied the other, "in company with that coarse housekeeper, who is no fit guardian for her. I do not know how so proud a man as Thorne can permit his daughter to be held in a sort of bondage by an ignorant and under-bred woman like Mrs. Benson. I pity the poor girl, for no one is allow-

ed to see her, and she never goes beyond the grounds of Thornhill, except to church."

"I wonder, for my part, that May does not effect her escape, for she comes of a haughty and defiant race on one side, and her mother had too much spirit for her own good, poor thing."

"They say that Thorne broke her heart at last. What a life that poor child must have led between them! And now her mother is gone, she is condemned to a worse one. I always thought it cruel to cage a bird, but it is far more so to seclude from all society a young and helpless girl and deny the hopes, fancies and affections of her age the food they crave. I only wish I had the right to interfere; I would lose no time in doing so."

"Nor will I lose any time in acquiring that right," thought the eager listener. "The sad beauty of that pale face haunts me, and I am sure I could love its owner passing well."

May had found means to make a friend of the girl who waited on her and also performed the duties of housemaid to the establishment. Nancy Bean was a good-natured, thoughtless creature, who resented Mrs. Benson's airs of authority, and took especial delight in annoying or assisting to deceive her in any way. A liberal present from her young lady had easily induced her to convey the letter to the post-office in L—— and consent that the reply should be sent under cover to herself. She jumped to the conclusion at once that her young lady had a lover, and the romance of assisting her to escape with him struck Nancy as the next best thing to having an adorer of her own.

As the weeks rolled by, and no answer came, May

was overwhelmed with humiliation and began to see how imprudent she had been to reply to the advertisement which had so deeply moved her. She had given up all hope of hearing from A. R., when Nancy came in from an expedition to L—— radiant with triumph.

She held up a yellow envelope and exclaimed :

“ It’s come at last, Miss May ; but if I was you I’d give him a piece of my mind for making me wait so long for it.”

With trembling hands the young girl tore open the envelope, and took from it a delicate rose-scented missive addressed to herself. The lines traced within breathed a poetic fervor, a delicacy of feeling, that were entrancing to the fair reader. Sinclair intimated his knowledge of her painful position, and declared himself most anxious to rescue her from it, with or without the consent of her father. He confessed to having seen her in church on the previous Sunday, as he was unwilling to commit himself without looking on the face of the writer of the letter which had so deeply interested him. He found her charming, and his heart at once bowed in homage before her. That he might have no advantage over her, he would enclose his photograph in the next letter, if she designed to continue the correspondence she had opened.

With flashing eyes and glowing cheeks the young girl read the respectful, yet glowing language of her admirer, and confessed to herself that if he should even prove less handsome than the ideal hero of her imagination, she could still love the writer of that beautiful effusion. Sinclair signed his own name, and although May noticed that the initials did not correspond with those given in the paper, she concluded that

he had not chosen to use his own. He gave his number and address in Philadelphia, and did not for a moment hesitate as to the propriety of carrying on the correspondence thus opened. In her ignorance of the world and its conventionalities, she did not dream of the power she was giving a stranger over her future fate.

Luckily for her, her letters fell into honorable hands, and each one only deepened the impression her appearance and story had made on the heart of her admirer. The sweetness and simplicity of her nature were gradually unfolded to him in the letters they exchanged, and Sinclair felt that by chance he had drawn a prize in the lottery of life which nothing should induce him to relinquish.

His photograph duly came, and the noble beauty of his person more than realized May's dreams of the man she could love.

For nearly two months this romantic correspondence was carried on, undetected by Mrs. Benson, and then came earnest petitions for a personal meeting. For this May had become almost as anxious as her lover; but how it was to be accomplished she could not divine. In the singleness and simplicity of her own heart she believed Harry Sinclair as worthy of trust as she felt herself to be, and she only desired to see him personally before pledging herself to fly from her hateful home to the protection of his love, if he asked her to do so.

Mrs. Benson still continued to watch over her charge with unflagging zeal, and how May was to evade her Argus eyes was a difficulty that seemed insurmountable. Nancy was faithful to her interests, but she

could suggest nothing better than to be allowed herself to administer a sleeping potion in the gin-toddy the housekeeper was in the habit of taking after dinner. The young lady refused to take this course, as Mrs. Benson would be sure to discover that she had been drugged ; and as some terrible mischief must be afoot, she would warn Mr. Thorne, and lead him to inquire into what was going on.

Sinclair came to L—— and managed to secure an interview with Miss Bean in the woodland below the house, without detection from Mrs. Benson, though she kept a pretty strict eye on the movements of that young damsel.

On the second morning after her interview with Sinclair, Nancy rushed into the young lady's room in a glow of exultation, exclaiming :

“ I didn't believe your faith would come to anything, Miss May ; but it has as sure as you're livin'. Mrs. Benson is took bad, and she thinks she's agoin' to have roomatis fever—she's got pains in all her jints, and she can't set her foot to the floor without yellin' like the wildcat she is. I never expected to rejoice at anybody's being took like that, but I am now, and I won't deny it. She's sent for Dr. Brandon, but when he comes I hope he won't be able to get her out of her bed for a good spell anyhow.”

“ Hush, Nancy ; you must not talk so, for rheumatic fever is a dreadful disease to suffer from ; and you seem to forget that you will have to nurse Mrs. Benson and bear with all her humors.”

“ So I shall, Miss May, but I shan't care for that if her sickness gives you a chance with Mr. Sinclair. Oh ! he's a beautiful man, and so nice spoken, too.

He's enough handsomer than that black picture he sent you, and he has the sweetest smile and the whitest teeth. Ah! it's you that is the lucky young lady to have such a beau, a-coming too to take you out of this gloomy old house, and give you a pleasant home of your own, where you can do just as you please."

"If I should go with him, Nancy, I shall take you with me, and you shall live with me till you find some one you like better. How does that please you?"

"It's the very thing I meant to ask you to do, Miss May; for after helping you away, I dar'n't stay here to be hauled over the coals by mother Benson, backed up by yer pa. Oh lor'! what *will* he do I wonder, when he finds out that you've given him the slip, and found somebody to pectect you from his tantrums?"

May sighed faintly, and said:

"I am glad you are satisfied to go with me, Nancy; but I must go now to Mrs. Benson and see what can be done for her. I am afraid that I am not as sorry for her attack as I should be, but I will at least see that she is not neglected."

May left the room and went toward the housekeeper's apartment, closely followed by Nancy. She found Mrs. Benson flushed with fever and complaining of acute pain in the limbs; but she seemed less concerned about her own sufferings than about the freedom her confinement to the house would afford her young charge. She peevishly said in reply to May's expressions of sympathy:

"The pain is bad enough, but I don't mind that so much as I shall you going philanderin' 'round the place with nobody to look after you but that hoity-toity piece, Nancy Bean. She wants a *gardeen* herself, and she aint fit to be trusted with nothin!"

“You’ll find that I can be trusted to nurse *you*, at any rate, Mrs. Benson,” said Nancy, demurely; “an’ as I’m all you’ve got to trust to, unless you hires a nurse, I think you’d better speak to me fair. The roomatiz has to be handled mighty gingerly, or them that has it ’ll suffer. But you knows all about that, caze you says you’ve had it once afore.”

Mrs. Benson snapped her small black eyes at her, but deigned no reply. She turned again to May, and said:

“It’s too warm to take them long tramps o’ yourn, Miss May, and while I’m laid up, I hopes you’ll not think of going far from the house. You can walk on the pearazza, and it’ll be a great comfort to me to hear you allymodin up and down there, in place of goin’ out in the woodland.”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Benson, I cannot give up my daily walks—I should lose my health if I did; and, as no other recreation is allowed me, I must enjoy that. I shall see that everything is done for you that is possible, but with Nancy for my companion, I can roam through the grounds as freely as I have been in the habit of doing. I think you had better send for a competent person to take care of you, and I will cheerfully pay her for doing so myself.”

“You’re very good, Miss May, but Nancy aint to be trusted, and the master promised me a congy if I kept you all safe till he came back. I don’t know what it was he meant to give me, but I know it was something handsome, for he don’t do things shabby.”

A silvery laugh rippled from the lips of May, and she said:

“I have observed that papa often takes pleasure in

puzzling you, by using French words, Mrs. Benson. You have misunderstood him, for *congé* means dismissal, and I scarcely think he would send away so faithful a spy as you have been."

Mrs. Benson half raised herself, but fell back with a sharp cry. She angrily said:

"You don't mean to say that Mr. Thorne bamboozled me in that way with his furrin lingo? After that, I don't care if you *do* go rampagin 'round with nobody but that slammakin gal for company. I've half killed myself a trapesin arter you, an' its little enough thanks I'll git for it at last."

"Mrs. Benson, I am not aware that my father gave you the authority to speak rudely to me," said May, with as much dignity as one so young could assume. "I prefer Nancy's companionship to yours at any rate, for she is not in my father's pay. She is fathful to me, if you are to him,—and I shall take my daily walks as usual; I do not apprehend any danger on my path."

"I'm a old fool to be vexin' of you, child," said the housekeeper, in a changed tone. "I didn't mean to be oncivil, but there's wolves in sheep's clothing in this lower spear, an' you might fall in the hands of one on 'em unbeknownst. That's why I'm so sot agin yer chassyin 'roun' wi' Nancy Bean. She's sich a light-headed critter that there aint no dependence to be placed in her."

"What is that you are saying, Mrs. Benson?" asked a cheery voice from the open door-way. "Are you trying to persuade May from taking her daily constitutional? That will never do, my good madame, for she looks as delicate as a snow-drop now, and without regular exercise, I should have her on my hands

too. How do you do, my dear?"—turning to May, and taking the hand she offered—"I thought I should never get to see you again, for when I have called, you were always denied to me."

"It warnt my fault, Doctor," said the sick woman, deprecatingly. "I had my orders, an' I was bound to 'bey 'em. Miss May aint one o' the obstroperlous kind, I'll say that much for her, and she aint giv me much trouble till now. But ef she resists in takin' of them walks without me, suthin 'll go wrong—I feel it in every ache of my bones."

"You absurd old woman, what harm can come to May from walking in her father's grounds in company with a well-behaved girl like Nancy here? You were slandering her when I came in, Mrs. Benson, for I know that she is trustworthy—her mother has been my cook for two years past, and if you will remember, it was I that recommended Nancy to you as a suitable person to be about your young lady."

"So you did; but she's a dreffle scatter-brain, an' I believe she'd be up to any mischief that would spite me."

"Pooh! nonsense! the girl is full of life, and thoughtless as those of her age are apt to be, but there's no malice in her. I know a steady woman I shall send up here to take care of you, for I'm afraid you'll have as sharp a bout of it this time as you did before, when you had inflammatory rheumatism. It's not a pleasant prospect I know, but I suspected how it would end when I heard that you were overheating yourself every day, trying to keep up with young feet in their rambles. It serves you right, my good woman, for treating this poor child as you have done."

Mrs. Benson piously said :

“ The Lord’s will be done. I can’t help myself, an’ the woman must come, I s’pose, ’specially as Miss May means to pay her wages. As to what I done to worrit her, Doctor, I only tended to the duty set afore me. I’m Mr. Thorne’s manager here, and bound to do what he tells me. ’Taint been no pleasure to me, I can take my affidavit, for I’ve tramped around through them woods till my feet is worn out, and my health too. I give up now, ef you say Miss May must go gallivantin roun’ without me, she’ll do it, an’ I shall lose my place. Send me suffin to keep me quiet an’ depose my narves.”

“ Oh, I shall do that, you may be sure ; but you need have no fear of being deposed—you suit your employer too well for that. Come, May, we will leave Nancy to take care of Mrs. Benson, and I will have a talk with you.”

Dr. Brandon was one of the few persons that May knew well and thoroughly liked. He had been the family physician from the date of her father’s marriage, and during the last few months of her mother’s life he had been almost a daily visitor at Thornhill. The young girl did not feel shy with him as with others, and she willingly followed him as he led the way to the front entrance. He said :

“ Come out with me on the terrace, May ; the sunshine will do you good. You really look like a hot-house flower, but I am not surprised at that, for the last few months of your life must have been a sore trial to you.”

Touched by his tone of sympathy, May tremulously said :

“Oh, Doctor, it has been as much as I could bear ; if this state of affairs continues much longer I shall go wild. Since poor mamma died, I have had no one to speak to but servants. Nancy is very good, but she is no companion for me, and Mrs. Benson is almost unendurable.”

He regarded her a few moments compassionately, and then abruptly asked :

“Have you heard nothing from your father ? Does he never write to you ?”

“No ; he sends brief notes to Mrs. Benson, but I never see them. She only tells me that he is well, and does not speak of returning home. Do you know where he is, Doctor ?”

“At the last accounts he was at Cape May, trying to win a successor to his late wife. Don’t look so shocked, child ; it is six months since your father became a widower, and you could not expect him to respect the memory of the woman he treated as he did your mother. If this Madam L’Epine will accept him, he will bring a step-dame here to rule over you.”

May wept softly a few moments, but she presently wiped her tears away, and proudly said :

“I should have expected nothing else ; but it hurts me deeply to know that all memory of mamma has been so soon set aside. Do you know anything of this lady, Dr. Brandon ?”

“I have been told that she is surpassingly beautiful, fascinating, witty and rich. She has produced quite a sensation at the Cape, and numbers adorers by scores, but your father has distanced them all. I am scarcely surprised at that, for he is still one of the handsomest men I know, and when he chooses he can be one of the most courtly and agreeable.”

"From the name, I suppose Madame L'Epine is a foreigner."

"She has lived in France many years, but it is said that she is an American by birth. I have told you this to prepare you for what your father will doubtless soon communicate himself; from what I have been told on good authority, I think that this lady will soon come hither to rule over Thornhill, and over you. I hope you may get along well together, but if you should not, May, remember that in me you have a friend who will stand by you. If the new Mrs. Thorne takes sides with your father against you, your life here may become intolerable. In that case, do not be afraid to appeal to me. I will do my best to aid you."

"Thank you, Doctor; but unless my father is kinder to the new wife than he was to my mother, she will be glad herself to make a friend, even of one as insignificant as I am."

"My dear, in this choice your father will follow the dictates of his own heart, and if Walter Thorne, with his temperament, and at his age, is as passionately devoted to this lady as rumor says, he may give her the power to break his heart, but he will hardly try to wound hers by harshness or neglect. You know nothing of his past history, May, or you would have some sympathy for him, in spite of his harshness to yourself. His marriage with your mother was a terrible mistake on both sides. Your grandfather was greatly to blame for the part he played—he forced his son to give up the girl on whom his heart was set, and made his union with your mother the condition of inheriting anything from him."

"But mamma surely did not know that he preferred another before herself," said May, breathlessly.

"I cannot tell how much or how little she knew. She was in Philadelphia when the scandal took place, for there *was* one, though I am not going to give you any of the details. She and your father were married by the dying bed of Mr. Willard, but something occurred to estrange them almost immediately. Poor Agnes found out the whole story of his devotion to that other one, and that laid the foundation of all the after wretchedness. His temper was embittered, and under his coldness and harshness, all the love she had felt for him gradually died out. I pitied them both—I think that Thorne had, and still has, much good in him, and a tender and loving influence may bring it to the surface again."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Doctor, and if this lady will restore my father's better nature, I shall love and bless her. The story you have told me is painful, but I am glad that I have heard it; it explains and excuses many things that have been to me a source of unmitigated bitterness."

"Then I am not sorry that I have told it, though I cannot tell what prompted me to do so. Your father would certainly not thank me if he knew that I had referred to his past history in any way in your presence."

The Doctor bade her a cheerful farewell, and with a thoughtful brow May went into the house again, and sought her own room to write a note to her lover, informing him that the long-delayed interview could take place that afternoon in the woodland in which she usually walked. A few hours later, Mrs. Gandy

came from L—— to assume the duties of nurse to the irascible patient, and Nancy was free to take the note to the place at which Sinclair had appointed to meet her, in the faint hope that something might occur to enable May to accompany her.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LOVERS.

THE grounds around Thornhill were extensive, and possessed of much picturesque beauty. Undulating hills and mossy hollows were shaded by forest trees, many of which had braved the storms of a century, and a narrow rippling stream sent its silvery current through a most romantic glen about half a mile from the house.

This was May's favorite place of resort, and a few rods from the margin of the stream a shelter had been built over a seat large enough to accommodate several persons. Wild roses and jessamine were trained over the latticed sides, and it was now a complete nest of verdure, though the flowers had long since shed their petals and passed away. In this spot May appointed the meeting with her unknown lover, and toward the close of the afternoon, with many misgivings, and much palpitation of her poor little heart, she prepared herself for the interview. Nancy was to go with her as far as the edge of the woodland, and discreetly keep near enough to her young lady to act as a sort of guardian, without intruding on the privacy of the interview.

As May drew near the glen, she saw that the rustic seat was occupied, and her heart gave a great bound as the tall form of Sinclair arose and rapidly advanced to meet her. She was almost breathless, and pale from agitation. Understanding her emotion, he repressed his own ardor, and gently taking her hand, drew it under his arm and said :

“ At last we meet face to face, Miss Thorne—or may I call you May ? I have addressed you in writing by that name so often, that it comes most familiar to my lips.”

Recovering herself a little, she impulsively said :

“ It is your right to do so, Mr. Sinclair, after all that has passed between us. Oh ! I fear that you will think me unmaidenly to have opened a correspondence with a stranger in the way I did with you ; but my position excuses it, if ever such imprudence was excusable.”

“ It does in my eyes, and would do so in those of every candid person. I bless the hour in which that letter was written, dearest May, for it led me to the happiness of my life. But for that, I might never have known you, never have loved you as the sweet revelations of your lovely nature in our subsequent correspondence has taught me to love. How I have yearned for this meeting—how anxiously I have watched to obtain a glimpse of you for the last few days, I cannot tell you. Nancy told me that your duenna was sick in bed ; and before she is able to set herself upon the watch again, I hope that we shall have arranged affairs on such a basis that her espionage will be of no importance.”

By this time they had gained the seat, and after a

few more words were exchanged, May gained courage to look up at the earnest face of her lover. Its candid, clear expression attracted her more than its beauty, handsome as Sinclair certainly was. He was looking down on her with infinite protecting tenderness ; and the lonely girl felt, as their eyes met, and held their mutual gaze spell-bound for a few moments, that the man beside her was worthy of the trust she had reposed in him. She frankly placed her hand in his, and said :

“ Now that I have seen you, I ratify with my lips all that my pen has said. I am not afraid to place my life in your keeping, as you have urged me to do.”

“ Then I seal the contract thus,” and he gathered her slight form to his breast, and kissed her on the brow, and lips ; then releasing her, but still holding the slender hand she had given him, Sinclair expressed his rapturous thanks in a voice that thrilled every pulse of the sensitive heart which vowed in that hour to remain true to the troth she had plighted, through every danger, every trial, the future might bring.

Almost without any volition of her own, May found herself talking to this comparative stranger as freely and unreservedly as if they had been reared together. The magnetism of his presence seemed to draw her nearer and nearer to him, and unlock the inner sanctuary of her heart, that all its fancies and feelings might be laid bare to his inspection.

Afterward, when May recalled that first interchange of thought and sentiment, she wondered how she could have spoken so unreservedly to him, and she blushed as she remembered many things she had said, though she did not repent the freedom with which she had expressed herself.

Even in this first interview, she felt that this man was the master of her fate ; but she had no fear that his gentle and noble nature would abuse the trust she reposed in him.

After an animated conversation of some length, Sinclair suddenly said :

“ Now that we know and understand each other, May, I have a confession to make which I do not think I can honestly withhold. I wish you to understand my position toward you, as well as I do yours to me.”

“ I am ready to listen to it, and give you absolution,” was the smiling reply.

“ Did you observe the discrepancy between the initials given in the advertisement to which you replied, and those of my own name ? ”

“ I did, but I supposed you preferred using false ones.”

“ The simple truth is, I did not use any. I am the last man in the world to do such a thing as advertise for a wife. If I could not have found one without doing such a thing as that, I should have gone to my grave unwedded.”

“ Then how did you come by my letter ? and what must you think of me for having written it ? ”

“ What I think of *you* has little to do with the letter. I love you, and I respect you, in spite of the imprudence which might have led to something very disastrous to yourself, had the man who wrote that advertisement been in earnest. You are too young, and ignorant of life to be blamed for the course you took, in the hope that you might release yourself from the painful position in which you are placed.”

May covered her face with her hands, and burst in tears.

After a slight pause, Sinclair gently went on :

“I bless the hour, May, in which you were impelled to write that little missive : for, strangely as it came into my hands, I was struck by the refinement and grace with which you responded to A. R. I will explain to you who he is, and how I appropriated what belonged of right to him. Ransom is a connection of my own—a thoughtless, but not at heart a bad fellow. He is in no want of a wife, and the advertisement sent by him was the result of a bet he had made with one of his fellow-students, that he would get at least fifty replies to such a thing. He won the bet, for he received at least seventy ; but, among them all, was but one to which the writer had appended her true name—that one was yours. I happened to go to Ransom’s room immediately after it was received. I thought the signature an assumed one, but he knew something of you, and he assured me it was genuine.

“I tried to induce him to burn the whole lot, but he would not consent. He permitted me, however, to rescue yours from the fate of the others, and take it away with me.”

“And what was the fate of the rest ?”

“I will tell you, that you may see what you have escaped. They were exhibited to Albert’s particular chums, read over with shouts of laughter, and such comments made upon them as would have made the cheeks of their writers tingle with indignation if they could have heard them. A matrimonial advertisement is always intended as a hoax, or a snare, as you would have known if you had had more experience, and it is

never safe to reply to one, however great the temptation."

"But the wretch said he was lonely, and I—sympathized with him so deeply that—that I did this foolish thing. I see now how wrong it was, and I don't know how you came to love one so easily imposed on."

"I saw that you were honest in what you had written, and that interested me. I came to L——to attend court, and I learned much of you which deepened that interest. I saw you in church, and I fell in love with you, with 'malice prepense' I suppose, for I went there prepared to do so. I determined to rescue you from the bondage in which you are held by that vulgar old woman, if you would permit me to do so."

"Oh! Harry, all this is very humiliating! The only consolation I have is, that we might never have known each other if I had not done so thoughtless a thing. As to Mr. Ransom, I only hope that you will never introduce him to me when——"

She stopped suddenly, and a bright flush came to her cheek.

Sinclair took up the unfinished sentence, and, with smiling gravity, completed it.

"When we are married, as I hope we shall be by the time Mrs. Benson is able to walk around again. In our home Ransom will not intrude, I assure you. I had a sort of charge over him while he was a student; but he has abandoned the profession and gone back to his father's farm, to labor at a calling that he is better fitted for than that of the law. My aunt is his stepmother, but that does not give him any claim on me; and he is not a man I should choose as a companion."

"I am glad of that, for I could never bear to see him."

“Then you will not refuse to go with me to freedom and happiness? Treated as you have been by your father, I scarcely think he has any right to object to the course I urge you to take, though I am convinced he would do so if he were made aware of my pretensions. Under other circumstances, I should think it base to steal a man’s daughter from him; but yours is a peculiar case, and, to you, a clandestine marriage is the only road to freedom from neglect and oppression.”

“I fear it is—but I cannot consent just yet to go with you. Let us defer any positive arrangement till Mrs. Benson is convalescing. She has rheumatism, and will not be able to walk about with me again for months to come. We can meet here daily as long as you remain in L——; and I think we had better know each other well before we take so irrevocable a step as the one you propose.”

“But the housekeeper may suspect something, and write to Mr. Thorne. I cannot bear the thought that he may come hither to pour the volume of his wrath on you when I may be away. Dearest May, consent to give me your hand as unreservedly as I believe you have given me your heart, for it will be best for us both.”

May obstinately shook her head.

“If I was silly enough to write that reply to Mr. Ransom’s falsehood, I will not be so undignified as to consent to elope with you in our first interview. There is no danger that papa will come hither, for he is in love himself with a dashing widow he met at Cape May; and from what Dr. Brandon said to-day, I scarcely think he will come home even to look after me till he brings his new wife with him.”

“Threatened with a step-dame, too! You cannot hesitate as to going with me after that. But I will not urge you to-day for a definite answer. My arrangements for our union are not yet completed; but I shall go steadily forward with them in the certainty that you will consent to leave your prison and fly with me to the home I am preparing for you. It is a cozy little nest, May: the only heritage left me by my parents is a small cottage in the suburbs of Philadelphia. It has a few acres of ground around it, which are embellished in the English style, for my father was a native of that country. The house is tasteful and perfectly comfortable, but it has no pretensions to splendor. Until very lately, it was occupied by careful tenants, who kept the grounds in good order; and to my partial eye, the place is a gem of beauty. It was the home of my childhood; and there my parents lived in perfect union till I had attained my fifteenth year. My mother then died of some chronic disorder from which she had long suffered, and my father did not long survive her. With strict economy the rent of the place sufficed to support and educate me; and now I can look forward with certainty to a successful, if not a brilliant career. The friend with whom I studied my profession is a lawyer of distinction: he received me into partnership as soon as I graduated; and for the last three years I have attended to the greater part of the business of the firm. I have a fair share of the profits, and I feel quite able to maintain my house in good style, though I cannot yet afford the luxurious manner of living to which you have been reared. All in good time, though; for, if health is spared to me, I will give you all, and more than you will ask.”

“I do not doubt the last assurance ; but if you knew the sick loathing with which I have looked around the splendid home which has, for months, been as a solitary desert to me, you would understand that to me, the dinner of herbs, where love is, will be far preferable to all its grandeur. Such as your home is, I will share it with you, and do my best to make it happy. I shall not come to you a dowerless bride, either, Harry, for I have a few thousand dollars that descended to me from my mother, and when I marry you, of course my little fortune will be yours.”

“Excuse me, May ; I shall never touch a penny of yours with the intention of appropriating it. I have always been of the opinion that a woman’s fortune should be secured to herself, for she is less able to win a support than a man is : and in case of failure, or accident to the husband, it is manifestly unjust that what belongs to the wife should be taken from her. I do not apprehend any such catastrophe to myself, but I shall nevertheless take every precaution to settle your money in such a manner that it will still be under your control.”

“You are very generous ; but if I can trust you with myself, I can surely trust you with my fortune.”

“True—and I prove myself worthy of your confidence by doing what I think is right. I must be allowed to have my own way in this, May ; for your father shall never class me among the fortune-hunters he is so much afraid of on your account.”

“How did you know that ?”

“Mr. Thorne has taken pains to proclaim that you are not to inherit his wealth, as a warning to those who might be in pursuit of an heiress ; he has furthermore

said that when you marry he will not permit your fortune to pass into the hands of your husband. As to myself, I feel my own ability to win both position and independence, and I have that manly pride which induces me to prefer providing for my wife, in preference to being indebted to her means for my future advancement. Thus far I have been successful in my career beyond my most sanguine hopes, and I am justified in looking forward to something more substantial than I have already gained."

"But, Harry, it will make me so happy to be able to help you on in any way."

"As you will, my sweet love, by making for me the happy home I have looked forward to as the reward of my toils."

May finally consented to this, at the same time pleasing herself with the thought that her annual income would almost suffice to support the modest home of which she had consented to become the mistress, and she could thus aid her husband in his upward struggle, if in no other.

As the shadows of evening began to gather, Sinclair said: "I shall remain in L—— four days longer, and every afternoon I shall come to this place, hoping to be joined by you, with the fair Nancy as your guardian angel. I see her now making energetic signals, which I suppose are intended as a significant hint to me to be off."

May arose and laughingly said:

"Time has long lagged heavily enough with me, but this evening it seems to have taken wings to itself. I must leave you now, but at the same hour I came to-day, I shall be in the glen to-morrow. Good-bye.

“Yes—to meet again. But for that promise I should scarcely be willing to let you go. You remove from me the sweet influence of your presence, but you leave with me so dear a hope that I can be happy in dreaming of it, and planning the fair future to be shared with you. My home will soon be ready to claim its queen, and then I shall ask for the last proof of your confidence in me.”

After a moment of hesitation, May said:

“Papa has not treated me kindly, but I shrink from leaving his house clandestinely, unless I am compelled to adopt such a course. Had you not better write to him, Harry, and state what you have told me? He cannot be so unreasonable as to object to you for a son-in-law, and he will not care to have a grown-up daughter in his house now that he is about to bring a new wife home.”

“I will write to Mr. Thorne on one condition, and that is, that if he refuses his consent to our union, you will not hesitate to leave his protection for mine. I have little hope of a favorable result from such an application; but, to satisfy your sense of duty, I will make it. Your father will expect you to marry a man already rich; and I know, beforehand, that he will refuse you to me, who must become the architect of my own fortune.”

“If he does, I will go with you, in spite of every effort to withhold me from you. That is my pledge, and here is my hand upon it.”

Sinclair pressed the fair hand to his heart, and drawing her to his breast, he sealed the promise with more than one kiss upon the lips that uttered it.

May extricated herself from his arms, blushing and trembling, and hurriedly said:

"I must go ; Nancy is making such violent demonstrations that some one must be coming this way. You had better screen yourself from observation behind the bower, for I should not like our meeting to become known to Mrs. Benson. She may have sent some one to spy upon me."

"It is undignified to retreat," he laughingly said ; "but as 'discretion is the better part of valor,' I obey my commanding general. To-morrow afternoon at five, remember, I shall await you here."

Sinclair had scarcely disappeared behind the screen of leaves, when a boy, whose business it was to look after the animals kept upon the place, appeared in the distance, apparently plodding along on his usual evening errand.

May moved carelessly from the spot on which she had parted from her lover, and joined Nancy. The girl eagerly said :

"Barney has been sent here to spy on us, Miss May. The pasture is on the other side of the place, and he ain't never been here afore as I knows on. Old Roomatics has sent him, sure, to see what we was up to. I've been makin' signs ever so long, but you didn't seem to mind 'em, an' I didn't expect nothing but that the little bogtrotter would come in sight of you afore Mr. Sinclair got out o' the way."

"All's well that ends well," said May, with a smile. "Harry can get out of Barney's path in time to avoid being seen. I shall speak to the lad, and ask him what brought him here."

"An' get some sharp fib in answer. Them Irish is too cute to be caught in a trap easily. Ef he was sent he ain't going to let you know about it."

Barney, a shrewd-looking, half-grown lad, with a shock of red hair and a pair of wandering greenish-gray eyes, came whistling on his way as if unconscious of the presence of any one in his vicinity. As his eyes fell upon his young mistress he started very naturally, pulled off his broken straw hat, and bobbed his head before her as respectfully as he knew how. May paused and asked:

“What brings you into the glen, Barney? You know that on this side of the grounds you have no business.

“Be gorra, Miss, and that same’s thrue enough, barrin the pig,” replied the lad, with a strong Irish accent. “Me pet pig, Miss May, as Misthress Benson giv me for me own has got out of the pen I put him in, and I’ve hunted the crayther over the place widout comin’ up wid him. Ye ain’t seen nothing of him now, has yees?”

“It’s like your impudence,” broke in Nancy, “to ask your betters if they’ve seen the brute you’re related to. Go where the corn is planted, if the pig is really out. You know well enough he ain’t down in this hollow, an’ that wasn’t what brought you here, Barney O’Shaughnessy.”

“I’m clane bate then, Miss Nancy, ef he ain’t down there. The poor feller ain’t related to me now, but when I ate him as I mane to do some o’ these days, he’ll be a blood relation then, shure enough.”

“Ugh! you wretch!—stand out o’ the path, and let Miss May pass on. I wouldn’t be such a cannibal as to eat my own brother, if I was you.”

The boy stepped out of the path respectfully; but when the young lady had passed, he significantly said to Nancy:

"I owe you one for that, Miss Bane, and shure I allers pays my debts. I'll find the crayther I'm after, afore I'm done yit."

Nancy waved her hand menacingly toward him, and said :

"If you hunt for him in this part o' the woods agin, it won't be good for you—that's all I have to say to you, Barney Carrots."

The lad shook his hair, as she uttered this opprobrious epithet, and grinning broadly, said :

"It's goold, red goold, Miss Bane, an' me hair is me pride—it crowns me with the color o' the risin' sun ; an' it's only envy in you to be callin' it carrots,—wishin' ye bether manners, I bid ye good evenin', Miss."

Nancy hurried after her young lady, and breathlessly said :

"That boy ain't no more looking arter a pig than I am. He's been sent by old fast-and-tight, I know well enough, an' ef he finds out that a man has been in the grounds a-talkin' with you, your 'pa will hear of it afore the week's out. My ! won't there be old hot to pay then !"

"Barney will not find any one to report on," said May, calmly. "And if Mrs. Benson should write to my father, it does not signify. Mr. Sinclair will do the same, and ask his consent to our marriage. I am unwilling to leave my home without, at least, giving him the opportunity to do what is right by me."

Miss Bean regarded her wildly, and after a breathless pause, solemnly asked :

"Are you really going to spile all your prospects, Miss May, by tellin' of yer 'pa what's a-goin' on here ? I thought you had more gumption than to put yourself

in *his* power agin. He ain't writ you a line since he went away, an' ef I was you, I'd make sure o' gettin' away afore he can come here in one o' his orfle tantrums. Anyways, I may pack up and git ready to move, for he'll send me out'n the house quicker'n lightnin' when he knows that I helped yer to git yer letters sent, and went with you to meet yer lovyer."

"I can't help it, Nancy, if he does ; but I'll tell you what you shall do if papa sends you away. Harry is getting his house ready for us to live in, and you shall go to Philadelphia and take charge of it till I come. I will give you money to take you there, and to get you something nice besides. How do you like that plan ?"

Miss Bean became radiant.

"I like it best of anything, Miss May ; and I'll be the most economical housekeeper as is to be found. My ! but you an' him *has* got 'long fast, considerin' that this arternoon is the fust time you ever sot eyes on each other."

May blushed vividly, but she laughed, as she replied :

"Harry has seen me in church ; and I had his picture, you know. We have written to each other twice every week for the last six weeks, and that has made us very well known to each other. He meant to marry me from the first, so he set about getting his home ready for my reception."

"But supposin' yer 'pa won't let you go, nohow ?"

"It is due to papa to ask his consent to our marriage, but, if he refuses it, I shall find means to escape, even if Mrs. Benson is set on the watch again. 'When there's a will, there's a way,' you know."

"Yer will may be strong enough, Miss May ; but if

you ever find a way to git out'n your 'pa's clutches, ef he shets 'em on you an' says you're to stay where you belongs, I'm mightily mistaken. Ef you vallies my advice, I'd say git clear off afore he knows what's a-goin' on."

"I can't do that, Nancy. I must satisfy my own conscience, let what will happen. You need have no fear as to the result. Harry is not a man to be thwarted, and he will find the means of rescuing me, even if I cannot soften papa and win him over to consent to my happiness."

Nancy struck her shoe against a rock that lay on one side of the path, and ruefully said:

"When that solid stone melts with pourin' water on it, you may soften yer 'pa, but not afore. But it's no use to talk—I see you've made up yer mind to make yerself mizzable, an what's more, to make that fine-spoken young man tear his hair an' 'wail his lot in the sollertude o' that house he's a fixin' up for nothin'."

"I hope he won't do anything so absurd as that. In place of spoiling his beautiful hair, Harry will set his brain to work to find some plan to rescue me from the captivity you seem to think inevitable."

By this time they had reached the house, and May went to Mrs. Benson's apartment to inquire into her condition. The invalid snapped her eyes viciously as she said:

"So you've got back safe: I hardly ever expected to see you agin arter you tramped out with nobody along but that Nancy. Ef Dr. Brandon does b'lieve in her, I don't, for I know she'll put you up to all sorts o' mischief. You aint nat'rally outbreakin', Miss May, but that owdacious piece will give you the wust advice—but you hadn't oughter take it, I can tell you."

“I am not likely to apply to my servant for advice, Mrs. Benson, nor do I choose to be taken to task in this way by you. I came to see if you are any better, not to listen to your scolding.”

“Better! no I aint better, I’m wuss—I’m one solid ache, an’ it’s all from trampin’ roun’ wi’ you, an’ gettin’ myself dead beat wi’ the walkin’ you did jest to aggrivate me. I aint takin’ yer to task fur it, but you see what you’s brought me to with your allymodin’ up an’ down as you has done sence I was sot to look arter you. I shall tell your father I’m down in the bed for a long spell, an’ he must find somebody what’s got more stiddiness than Nancy Bean, to go out with you.”

“You can write as soon as you please—I have no objection. Good evening, Mrs. Benson. Hereafter I shall send some one to inquire into your condition, and report to me, for I do not choose to be spoken to in this rude manner.”

May left the room, and the housekeeper ruefully muttered: “Things aint right, or she wouldn’t be so undependin’ all to onct. She’s found somebody to make frien’s wi’—I’m as sure of that as can be. I wonder if it’s that old doctor, now. Ef it is, who knows how long he’ll keep me a-groanin’ on this bed? Oh lor! there, that pain comes agin. Miss Gander, if yer name didn’t suit you to a notch, you’d find suffin to do for me that would give me some depose.”

“My name aint Gander any more’n your’n is goose,” retorted the offended nurse; “an’ ef you will get to rampin’ ’round an’ set yourself to achin’ all over, how can I help it? I folly’s the doctor’s directions, an’ that’s all I qualified to do when I come here to nuss you. Ef you gin me any more such sass, I’ll jest walk off an’ leave you to be took care of by Nancy.”

"Oh Lor, it has come to a pretty pass when a common hired nuss talks to me in this unspec'ful way. I has been used to desociate wi' yer betters, Miss Gandy, an' I aint inspectin' to be talked to like common folks by the people I pays to wait on me."

"Ef I am a hired nuss, you's a hired housekeeper, and I don't see a mite o' difference atween us. As to *your* payin', I never 'spected to git nothin' from sich a ole stingy as everybody knows you is. Dr. Brandon told me that Miss Thorne would pay me to take care on you; an' ef 'twasn't for the respect I has for *her*, I'd go away this minnit, and leave sich a onmannerly thing as you is to do the best you could without me."

"Do you dare call me a *thing*! you! you!" screamed the housekeeper. But the further outpouring of her wrath was suspended by a violent attack of pain, which fairly took all power of further vituperation from her. The nurse who was really a kind-hearted woman, did all that her skill suggested to relieve the sufferings of her patient; and, for a time, a truce was established between the two.

Mrs. Benson was sinking to repose under the influence of a powerful narcotic, when a faint tap came to the door, and she roused herself to bid the applicant for admission to enter. Mrs. Gandy had gone to her supper, and she knew who had taken advantage of her absence to report to her the result of the errand on which he had been sent.

Barney came in, respectfully holding his battered straw hat in his hand, and made a low reverence as he approached the bed.

"Please mum," he said, "I went after the young mistress as yees tould me, an' faix I don't belave she

was glad to see me at all, at all. She tould me, I hadn't no call to be that side o' the place, an' I'm not to go to the glin agin."

"Is that all you've got to tell me, you stupid gossoon? What did I send you after her for? Can't you come to the pint at onct?"

"Well, mum, I didn't say nobody a talkin' to her, but Nancy was on guard, an' she wint on at me like bleezes, coz I comed on 'em, an' I thought to-morrow arternoon I'd hide ahind that sate wi' the vines an' things fornenst me, an' find out what they're up to. But you'll be sure to give me the goold eagle you promised me, Miss Benson?"

"I'll give it when its airned, Barney, lad. You jest foller 'em up, an' let me know what's a goin' on, an' you shill have the money. But it was only a half eagle, remember. Watch yer chances, an come in here when that Gander is out in the room. *She* musn't know what you're up to on no 'count."

"Yis'm—I knows—an' I shall do my best to plaze ye. I'd best be goin' now, for I hears somebody a comin'."

"Yes—go out this other door, an' down the back stairs, an' when you comes agin, come that way."

Barney crept away, and Mrs. Benson muttered:

"I knowed it—there's somebody gallivatin' 'round here, a lookin' arter that onprudent young gal. Ef her pa would only have sense enough to ax *me* to marry him now, wouldn't I hold her in hand, an' I'd keep *him* in order, too, rampageous as he is when he's in one of his ways."

Mrs. Gandy came in, took her place by the bed, and sharply said:

“It’s time you was asleep, Mrs. Benson; ef you go to gittin’ yerself excited about anything, you’ll git in a wuss snarl than I got you out’n afore supper—an’ you’ll be a screechen’ with pain this blessed night. Them composin’ drops acts contrairy, when folks don’t try to be quiet therselves, an’ give ’em a chance to settle the narves.”

“Ef you don’t keep up a clatter wi’ yer tongue, I shill soon sink in the arms of Morfy, Miss Gandy; but you is the unaccountablest talker I ever dessociated with. I’m floatin’ ’way now to the land o’ dreams, but ef you brings me back to the sorrers o’ achin’ bones, I won’t let you git no depose yerself.”

“Oh, I dessay—you’d do yer best to aggrawate me, though I was doin’ all I could for you. You’s welcome to sink into anybody’s arms but mine; but I never heard tell o’ Morfy afore, ’cept de chess playin’ man, an’ he’s far ’nuff from this.”

“You’s a poor ignorintramiustus, Miss Gandy; but I don’t ’spect a nuss what has no intlectibleness to onderstan’ my lit’rary delusions. I hearn Mr. Thorne read ’bout Morfy out’n a book called Shake-a-spear. A curious name for a man that only shook a pen.”

“No—I don’t understand your delusions, an’ what’s more, I don’t want to: you talks ’bout what you don’t know nothin’ yerself, an’ then calls ’spectable people names coz they don’t know what you means. As to ignorantramuses, I think you’s the biggest one I ever seed. I knows how to nuss peeples what’s sick, an’ I don’t pertend to nothin’ else.”

How long the war of words might have lasted is uncertain, if the influence of the narcotic had not chained the tongue of one of the combatants. Mrs.

Benson dozed off, and finding her no longer troublesome, Mrs. Gandy retired to repose with the agreeable conviction that she could hold her own ground against the patient she had undertaken to manage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEW JAILER.

ON the following afternoon another interview took place between the lovers, but they did not remain near the bower. After meeting at this trysting place, Sinclair drew the arm of May beneath his own and said :

“ I heard a suspicious rustling among the vines just now, and I suspect that some one is concealed there who has been sent hither to watch us. It does not signify, as I have written to your father, and he will know my position toward you before any officious person can warn him of our meeting. Let us promenade on the margin of the stream, where the prying eaves-dropper cannot overhear what we have to say.”

Nancy was demurely sitting on the grass at the entrance of the dell with her knitting-work in her hands, and May made a sign to her to approach. She spoke a few words to the girl in a low tone, and then moved away with her lover.

Nancy plunged at once into the nest of verdure behind the seat, caught Barney by the hair, and dragged him from his place of concealment. For a moment he seemed bewildered by the suddenness of the

proceeding, but he recovered himself, threw back his shaggy mane, and with a malicious twinkle in his eyes, said :

“I’ve found out all I comed for, Misthress Nancy, an’ I’ll make use of it in spite of ye. The ould woman up yander, she’ll know what you’re helpin’ Miss May to do. That ere nice looking young man don’t kape coomin’ here for nothin’, an’ she’ll be a-runnin’ off wi’ him ef her pappy don’t look sharp; but *you’ll* git yer walkin’ papers afore she gits a chance to start, I b’lieves.”

“Don’t be a idiot, Carrots, and what’s wuss, a imperent one, coz *I* don’t take no sass from the likes of you,” replied Miss Bean with a great assumption of dignity. “I wishes you to understand that the gentleman what comes here a talkin’ wi’ Miss May has business of importance to settle with her, an’ he has writ to her pa a lettin’ of him know all about it. *Now* what do you say to that, you spyin’ vagabone?”

The boy put his thumb to his nose and spread out his fingers with a flourish, as he said :

“No *ma’am*, you don’t come it over this chile wi’ sich chaff as that. Ef that ere young jentleman has business with Miss May, why don’t he come to the house an’ say her there?”

“Becase it’s pleasanter to walk here in the shade o’ the trees, to be sure; I aint a tellin’ of you no lies, Barney, an’ ef you knows which side yer bread’s buttered, you’ll not go back to old Achinbones to tell her what you’s seen down here. How much did Mrs. Benson offer to give you to come spyin’ round here now? I don’t care what it was, I’ll give yer double to hold yer tongue; an’ ef yer won’t do it, I’ll make my

brother give you such a thrashing as will last you a long time."

Barney scratched his head as if puzzled, but presently said :

"It's meself that don't know how I'm to help takin' ye up 'bout the money, Misthress Nancy. It's a goold pace wi' a whole aigle upon it that ye'd have to gi' me, for the 'tother one offered me a half one, though sorre me knows how the ould bird is to be cut in two on a goold pace."

"So you've been bribed, sure enough, you spalpeen, I'll git the eagle from Miss May for yer and give it to yer to-night, if ye'll go back to Mrs. Benson an' tell her that yer saw nobody about that hadn't a right to be here. That won't be a lie, anyhow, for that young gentleman down yonder has the right to talk wi' Miss Thorne."

"Who gin' it to him, Miss Bane?" asked Barney, stolidly.

"'Taint none o' your business who did; but he's got it anyhow; an' yer tell jest what I say to yer, or Sammy shall take yer in hand an' teach yer better manners than to come peekin' after things that don't consarn yer."

"I done what I was toold ter do, an' what I 'ar to be paid for doin', but ef yer bid's higher'n 'tother, I'll take yer goold an' be mum."

"You'd better be, ef yer cares for yer bones, for Sammy's got a heavy hand o' his own, an' ef I told him to lay on hard, he'd beat you to a jelly. March yerself off now, and hold yer tongue, or it'll be wuss for you. I'll give you yer pay arter I git it from my young lady."

Barney thus dismissed, shuffled away, but when he was out of sight he snapped his fingers toward the glen and moved in the direction of the house, muttering to himself:

“ I’ll be even with you yit, Miss Nancy Bane, that’s what I will. I’ll take yer money, and the ’tother one’s too, but ye’ll see that I’ll be too much for ye, in spite of Sammy wi’ the heavy hand.”

The lovers walked to and fro upon the margin of the romantic little stream that flowed through the grounds, talking such sweet nonsense as made the time pass on rapid wings. The heart of the lonely girl opened to new influences beneath the tender words and glances of Sinclair, and even at this early stage of their acquaintance, May felt that to give up the hopes he had kindled into life would be impossible.

Sinclair had no hope that his appeal to her father would be successful, though May clung to the belief that he would consent to their union. In the event of refusal every detail of the elopement that would then be their only resource, was discussed and settled. When the sun sunk behind the trees, and the glen began to gloom with the shadows of twilight, they at length reluctantly separated with a promise to meet again on the following afternoon.

On their way home Nancy informed her young lady of the discovery of Barney behind the bower, and gave her an account of the interview between them. That night Carrots received the gold piece for which he had bartered his fidelity to the house-keeper, with a promise of still further reward if he was faithful to his new compact. He satisfied Mrs. Benson by creeping to her room and telling her that nothing had as yet

been discovered that was worth telling, but he should keep up his espionage, and before long he had no doubt she would find his services worth the reward she had offered him.

The meeting of the pair continued from day to day for more than a week, for Sinclair had decided to remain in L—— till a reply came from Mr. Thorne. Every hour thus passed together deepened the attachment they had formed, till each one believed that the world would be well lost for the sake of the other.

On the afternoon of the seventh day the answer to Sinclair's letter arrived. It was brief, and to the point.

“CAPE MAY, August 2, 18—.

“MR. HARRY SINCLAIR—*Sir* :—I find it a very singular proceeding on your part to make a proposal for the hand of my daughter when I am in utter ignorance of your person, position and antecedents.

“It is true that you have referred me to various parties in Philadelphia for information on those points, but as I have neither time nor inclination to communicate with them, I must return a decided negative to your obliging offer to take Miss Thorne off my hands.

“In conclusion, let me say that I have other views for my daughter, and without my consent she will hardly venture to bestow herself on you, or any other man. If you are a gentleman, as you assert yourself to be, after receiving this you will withdraw all pretensions to a girl whose acquaintance you must have clandestinely made. I make no comments on such a course, as they would be superfluous ; but I shall take my own measures to prevent any imprudence on the part of the young girl you are ready to entice from her home.

“WALTER THORNE.”

Sinclair had scarcely expected a more courteous reply, but he felt offended at the cavalier style adopted by the writer, and every scruple with reference to the removal of May from her father's guardianship vanished as he read the words he had penned.

It was the hour for his usual visit to the glen, and he left the town immediately, and walked rapidly in the direction of Thornhill. When he came in sight of the trysting place, he saw Miss Bean walking to and fro in an excited and agitated manner, and as he advanced towards her she exclaimed :

“It's all done and over, Mr. Sinclair ; I knew how it would be when Miss May had that letter sent to her pa. I'm sent off at a minit's warnin' and there's a regular she-dragon come to look arter that poor lamb, what aint got no friends to stand by her in that house. She's a cryin' her eyes out over a letter that woman brought her. She sent this to you by me, but it was as much as ever she could do to get it writ without that Mrs. Black a findin' of it out.”

In much perturbation, Sinclair took the little twisted note offered by Nancy, in which was written in pencil :

“My father has taken great offence at your letter, and he has written to me in a very violent manner. He has sent me a new duenna, who is to become my governess. She will occupy the same room with me, and her orders are never to lose sight of me for a moment. If you could see Mrs. Black you would comprehend how little hope of evasion is left, with such a woman on guard. She is as watchful, and observant, as a police detective ; as cold and undemonstrative, as if made of cast iron.

“My father gives no reason for his rejection of your proposal. He was far too angry to do that. He lays down the law to me, and takes care that I shall have no opportunity to break it, by setting this repulsive guardian over me.

“Oh, Harry, but for my faith in your love, and your power to rescue me ultimately from this thralldom, I should die. With the sweet hope of yet becoming yours, I can bear a great deal, but if that is taken from me, I shall sink into the deadly state of apathy from which your letters first aroused me. But for that burst of sunshine on my weary life path, I believe I should have become idiotic. You were my Saviour from such a fate, and to you I feel that I owe the devotion of my life.

“I abjure my allegiance to the father who has been one to me but in name, and if you can rescue me from the power of this dreadful woman, I will go with you without one pang of regret for the filial obligations I have violated.

“I have one friend in L——. Go to Dr. Brandon and tell him all. I think he will help us. He knows how violent and unreasonable my father is, and when you satisfy him as to your position and antecedents, he may be willing to do something to aid us. Show him this portion of my letter, and make him understand that I must escape from the life with which I am threatened here.

“Poor Nancy has been sent away by my father's orders, and she will give you this. I have promised her that she shall go to Philadelphia to take charge of your house till I can become its mistress. But if she would be contented to remain in L—— a few weeks

I would prefer it, as I may need her services when you have arranged for my escape, as I know you will.

“There will be no possible way of communicating with each other by letter, unless Dr. Brandon will become our friend. He can have access to me, as he comes daily to Thornhill to visit Mrs. Benson, as there is little prospect that she will speedily recover.

“I have scribbled this at intervals, while Mrs. Black unpacked her things, and took possession of my room as coolly as if it belonged to her. I can now only add that I love you, I trust you, and when you can snatch me from the durance in which I am held, I will go with you.

“MAY.”

After reading these lines, and pressing the last precious assurance to his lips, Sinclair placed them next his heart, and then turning to Nancy, said :

“The situation is an unpleasant one, but you need not despair of soon seeing your young lady free to go whither she will, with no guardian more exacting than I am likely to prove. I shall find the means to remove her from Thornhill in a few days at farthest, and you had better go to your friends in L——, and remain ready to accompany her when I shall call on you to do so. She cannot be married in this State, and when we fly together, you shall go with us, Nancy.”

“Oh! Mr. Sinclair, if that could ever be! But you aint a goin’ to git a-head of Mr. Thorne. Nobody ever has yet; an’ I knowed how it would be when you writ to him. Miss May will pine and fret her heart out, as she did afore you come along, an’ made her think that she had something worth living for. I’ll go to L—— an’ wait, but it won’t be no use—you’ll never get her out’n that dragon’s clutches.”

"I shall try, at all events, and I do not despair of success. If I am defeated for the present, I shall still hope for a better day. If I cannot baffle Mrs. Black's watchfulness within the next three weeks, I will send you to my home in Philadelphia, to remain there till its mistress comes to take her place in it."

Nancy brightened a little at this promise, but she was still very despondent. She said:

"Thank'ee, sir, I'll stop as long as you think best, and Miss May has given me money to pay my way till she can take me in her service agin. My mother lives at Dr. Brandon's an' she tole me to go there first, an' tell the doctor the snap she's in. Arter that you could see him, an' find out ef he'd stan' by her in her trouble. *He* knows all about the way she's been treated, an' mebbe he'll find pluck to help her."

"Perhaps so," said Sinclair, vaguely, for he was thinking deeply, and wished to be free from Nancy's presence that he might arrange his plans in solitude. "Follow the directions of Miss Thorne, and I will find means to communicate with you when we need your services."

"That won't be very soon, mind my words; but I'll go on to the town now, sir, and leave you to think things out."

As Nancy walked down the shaded pathway leading to a lower gate that opened from the grounds, Barney came from his concealment in a clump of undergrowth near the spot on which he had been standing, and making a mocking gesture of defiance, muttered:

"Youv'e got yer walkin' ticket anyhow, Miss Bane, an 'you'd not be to the fore to call me Carrots agin in a hurry. Goin' to get old Pillbox to help 'em, is they?"

Much good that'll do 'em wi' *me* to spy on 'em. I likes Miss May well enough, but she's no business to be runnin' off with that ere yaller-haired chap, an' I'll tell on her jest to spite that Nancy."

Sinclair had walked up the glen, when he parted from the girl, and Barney took good care to keep out of his sight. Half an hour later he saw him sitting dejectedly on the seat beneath the bower, and then went slowly back to the house to make his evening report to Mrs. Benson.

To describe the wrath and astonishment of that personage at the advent of the new governess would be impossible. The small progress she had made toward convalescence was suddenly checked and she declared herself worse than ever.

About four o'clock in the afternoon a carriage had been driven to the door of Thornhill from which a tall angular woman, wearing glasses, alighted. She had on a brown dress, shawl and bonnet, and carried an umbrella of the same sombre hue in her hand. Two trunks were deposited in the hall, and their owner sharply inquired of Nancy, who had gone to the door to receive her :

"Where is Miss Thorne? I have a communication from her father which is very important. Show me into a room—I am not accustomed to stand in peoples' halls, with their servants staring at me as if I was a *lusus naturæ*. Is your name Nancy Bean?"

"Walk in here, please'm," was the flurried reply. "I'll tell Miss May that company's come—'taint often we has any, goodness knows. But ef you comes from Mr. Thorne, it's all right."

"Of course it's all right, or I should not be here at all. But I ask you again, are you Nancy Bean?"

"Yes'm—that's my name, an' I ain't ashamed of it."

"Then you ought to be, if you are not. You may pack up your clothes and get out of this house within an hour. I have authority from Mr. Thorne to pay you your wages and send you off. I have come here to take charge of Miss Thorne's education, and to see that she is not allowed to form improper acquaintances. Here is my card and a letter from her father—take them to her, and say that I am waiting to speak with her."

A brown leather satchel with a steel clasp was opened with a vicious snap, and the articles in question thrust into the girl's unwilling hands; then Mrs. Black sat suddenly down on the very edge of a chair, and looked straight and defiantly before her.

Nancy hurried to May's room and thrust the letter and card before her, hysterically saying:

"My words has done come true a-ready, an' I is ordered to tramp by a brown woman that's took possession o' the parlor, an' for that matter of the house too, an' she's been sent by yer 'pa to teach yer how to behave yerself."

May looked startled at this sudden address; she glanced at the card and grew very pale—then without a word, broke the seal of her letter and read the cruel words it contained. It is useless to quote them, for the harsh language of an indifferent and offended father with such a temper as Walter Thorne possessed, are better imagined than repeated. He was furious that she had found means to form a clandestine attachment in spite of his precautions, and declared that nothing should induce him to receive Harry Sinclair as his future son-in-law. That he had wooed her in so

underhand a manner proved to him that the young man was unworthy of confidence, and he chose to ignore the fact that his own course toward his daughter had left no other avenue open to either of them.

Thorne ended by stating that Mrs. Black had till lately been sub-governess in a large city boarding-school in which the pupils were very strictly kept. She was a thorough martinet, and would shirk none of the duties imposed on her. May was stringently commanded to submit herself to the constant surveillance of this Argus-eyed dame, and to make no attempt to evade her authority.

The poor girl wept some bitter tears over this letter, but she soon wiped them away and gave Nancy such directions for her guidance as were possible in the excited state of her feelings. She ended by saying :

“I must go to this stranger now, or she will be offended at my delay. Do you get ready to leave, and I will find time to write a few lines to Harry, to be taken to him as you pass through the grounds. You will be sure to find him at the usual place. I am hurt at what papa has said to me, Nancy, but I am not disheartened by his opposition. I shall get away from Mrs. Black in spite of her watchfulness.”

“When it’s done I’ll believe it, Miss May. You aint seen her yet. She’s as hard as stone and sharp as steel.”

“I can’t stop to talk now, Nancy ; remember what I have said, and don’t try to make me despond, when I need all my courage to help me in this strait.”

When May entered the parlor in which Mrs. Black had been left so long alone, she found that lady divested of shawl and bonnet, walking to and fro with

the firm tread of a sentinel on duty. She faced around as the light step of the young girl announced her entrance to her sharp ears, and brusquely said :

“ My pupil, I suppose. You’ve kept me waiting some time, Miss Thorne, but as you had your father’s letter to read and its contents to digest, I can excuse that. But I wish to say to you at once that I will tolerate no disrespect in any shape. I’ve been used to girls, and I know their ways—I’ve been sent here to take absolute authority over you, and to be responsible for you ; so you must make up your mind to have me always near you. I shall occupy the same room, share all your employments, and never allow you, for any period of time, to be absent from me.”

To this unceremonious address May coldly replied :

“ Of course I must submit to the will of my father, Madam ; but under the circumstances, you cannot expect from me a very gracious welcome to Thornhill. At an earlier period of my seclusion, if papa had sent me a companion at all congenial to me, what has so deeply offended him might never have occurred. As things now are, bolts and bars will not eventually hinder me from evading the bondage in which you are commissioned to hold me.”

Mrs. Black eyed her through her spectacles as May uttered a defiance she considered so audacious, and her thin lips unclosed to say :

“ Upon my word ! rebellion at the outset. I hardly expected so bold an avowal as that from a girl as young as you are ; and one, too, who has been guilty of a breach of decorum which might be ruinous to all her future prospects. I see that you do not understand how much you have risked in clandestinely mak-

ing the acquaintance of a stranger, and even allowing him to write and ask Mr. Thorne's consent to your marriage with him. After such an experience as that, no man of delicacy or refinement would ever ask you to be his wife."

"I never intend to listen to such a proposal from any other than Harry Sinclair, and if papa had chosen to satisfy himself of his worth, he would have spared himself the trouble of seeking you for my duenna, and me the annoyance of being dictated to by such a person as you seem to be. The manner in which you addressed me when I came in proves to me that you are not fitted for the position in which my father has chosen to place you. I am helpless, and, to a certain extent, in your power, but I am of the Thorne blood, and that resents and recoils from oppression in every shape."

Mrs. Black frigidly retorted :

"As fiery blood as yours has been tamed by me before now ; I shall superintend your studies, and give you so much to do that you will have no time to dwell on the sentimental folly of which you have been guilty. I am tired and hungry and wish to accompany you to your room. As I have promised not to lose sight of you, we must, of course, occupy the same apartment. Will you be good enough to lead the way ? "

Mrs. Black gathered up her bonnet, shawl, and umbrella, and stalked grimly after her unwilling companion. May felt the uselessness of resistance, though she rebelled in every fibre of her nature against the authority this interloper asserted over her in the house of which she should have been mistress.

When they reached the suit of rooms appropriated

to the daughter of the house, Mrs. Black glanced around approvingly, for Walter Thorne denied May nothing that money could obtain, and they were elegantly and appropriately furnished. A bed-room and sitting-room opened from each other, and in the last was her piano and guitar.

Mrs. Black threw herself into the comfortable lounging-chair that was drawn up near an open window, commanding a lovely prospect, and said :

“I am sure if I had such a home as this I should never wish to leave it. The perversity of poor, fallen human nature is wonderful, and I am sorry to see it illustrated in a creature of such tender years as yours, Miss Thorne. I think I shall be perfectly comfortable here, and I shall not risk the loss of such pleasant quarters by any neglect of the duties assigned me. Where is that girl who must have aided you in your late underhand course? I wish to settle with her, and send her about her business.”

“Did my father also give you authority to dismiss the servants, Mrs. Black? Nancy is a faithful and industrious girl, and the housekeeper may not be able to fill her place very soon.”

“She has no doubt been faithful enough to *you*, but as her services as a go-between are not desirable, I shall use the power delegated to me to send her away at once. It was well for the housekeeper herself that she notified Mr. Thorne of her illness, and deprecated the idea of leaving you with such a companion as Miss Bean in your daily walks, or she would have gone after her. I shall not interfere with her in any way, but while she is unable to attend to the house, I shall look after it myself.”

"I am to understand, then, that for the time you remain, you are to be mistress of the establishment?"

"Precisely; and such a position suits my taste. I have fine administrative abilities, and I am glad of a field in which to exercise them. Is the young person I wish to see in the adjoining room?"

"You will find her there, Madam, I believe, if you are not afraid to lose sight of me long enough to speak with her," replied May, drily.

Mrs. Black gave her a sharp glance of disapproval, but she arose, and said:

"I will send her away at once, and then you and I can come to a better understanding. I shall not tolerate impertinence from a pupil, either in manner or words, and you will find it best to yield gracefully to the authority with which your only parent has clothed me."

She stalked into the adjoining apartment, where Nancy was swelling with indignant wrath, at finding herself and her young lady placed at the mercy of this dictatorial woman.

Her brown skirts had no sooner disappeared than May flew to her writing-desk, took from it the package of precious letters written to her by Sinclair, and also a supply of note paper. A carved cabinet stood in one corner of the room, and into a secret drawer known only to herself she thrust them, keeping a single sheet of the paper, on which she hurriedly began to write, with a pencil, the note she had sent to her lover.

She had completed but a few sentences when she heard her duenna returning, and thrust the paper under under a pile of music, to be taken out and scribbled on again when an opportunity offered.

Mrs. Black triumphantly said:

"I have settled that matter, and Nancy Bean goes, bag and baggage, within the hour. I have ordered her to have my trunks brought up, and, if you will show me where to put my things, I will unpack and arrange them. I never feel settled till I do that; and I shall be glad to have something to eat, for I have not dined."

"You can issue your own orders, Madam, for I never interfere with domestic arrangements. That is Mrs. Benson's province," said May, gravely. "Since you persist in intruding in my chamber, I will show you a wardrobe in which you can put some of your things, but the dressing-table with the drawers is appropriated to my own use."

"There is room enough for another, and I shall have one brought from some of the chambers not in use. Mr. Thorne told me to make such arrangements as would suit my own convenience, and I shall certainly do so."

"I perceive that such is your intention," was the cold reply.

The carriage-driver was called on to bring in the trunks—which were neither heavy, nor very large. With the assistance of Nancy, an old-fashioned bureau was brought from one of the upper rooms, and a place found for it between two of the windows; and Mrs. Black became absorbed in the occupation of arranging her wardrobe in its capacious drawers.

May hastily finished her note, while she was thus employed, and gave her ally her parting injunctions. When she could write unobserved, she promised to do so, and if the opportunity offered, to drop her letters in

the hollow of an old tree that stood by the pathway leading into the glen ; and Nancy was to make a daily pilgrimage to the spot, to see if anything had been deposited there.

In spite of the stubborn and defiant spirit May had shown toward her new jailor, she wept bitterly when she parted from the poor girl who had so long been about her person ; but Nancy was far too indignant to shed tears. She pressed the hand that clung to hers to her lips and heart, and said :

“ Don’t you give up, Miss May. I’ll do all I kin to git you out o’ this ; that old dragon is so blind that if anything happened to her specs, she couldn’t tell what you was doin’. If I was you I’d break ’em, or get ’em lost a purpose.”

“ That is a good hint, Nancy, and I may act on it ; good-bye, now, and go at once, so as to give me time to compose myself before my tormentor comes in. I do not choose to let her see how much she has the power to grieve and annoy me.”

Nancy tore herself away, leaving her box, with her few worldly possessions, to be sent after her to Dr. Brandon’s, where her mother and brother both lived—the latter as gardener and hostler. After her story was told, she believed she would be allowed to remain until something definite was settled as to her young lady’s fate.

In compliance with May’s wish, Sinclair called that evening upon the doctor, taking with him several letters on business from men in responsible positions, to prove his claim to consideration. Nancy had already enlisted the sympathies of the benevolent physician by relating to him the history of her young lady’s perse-

cutions ; and, although he shook his head disapprovingly over the romantic meetings in the glen, he was not greatly surprised to learn that May had made every effort to escape from the dreary monotony of her life at Thornhill. If she had given her heart to a worthless scamp, he thought it would be a fitting punishment to her father for his treatment to her, though a very sad thing for the unhappy child herself."

In spite of Nancy's assurances that Mr. Sinclair was a very fine gentleman, indeed, Dr. Brandon had many misgivings ; but when the young lover called on him, and frankly told him the whole story of his acquaintance with May, from its commencement down to that day, he could not refuse either belief or sympathy, but he hesitated about granting assistance to Walter Thorne's daughter to arrange an elopement.

After conversing together long and earnestly, the doctor said :

"I have an old-fashioned prejudice in favor of children submitting to the will of their parents ; but in this case, the power is so tyrannically used that I can almost excuse that helpless girl for trying to set it at naught. If her father cared for her or her happiness, I would refuse all aid to you, but he does not ; from her infancy May has been an object of indifference to Walter Thorne—the coldness he felt for her unhappy mother extended to her child, unnatural as it seems. Mrs. Thorne had some money which was settled on her children, and I am afraid that May was shut up at Thornhill because she would not relinquish the control of it to her father."

"You will not refuse to help us then, Dr. Brandon," said Sinclair with eagerness. "If it is the money Mr.

Thorne wants, he is welcome to it; all I ask is his daughter. I can support my wife without any aid from her resources, and if May chooses to relinquish her inheritance, she can do so at once; in a few years, I shall be able to make a better settlement on her, and I will do it."

"I believe you to be thoroughly in earnest, Mr. Sinclair, and I honor your disinterestedness; but the offer to give up May's little fortune as the price of his consent to her union with you would not be listened to by her father, after refusing it as cavalierly as he refused you. I do not know what his views for her may be, but I am very sure that he will care little about promoting her happiness. She has thwarted and offended him, and he will seek to punish her for it. I will have nothing to do with an elopement—and if such a thing is arranged, I wish to know nothing about it; but I will not refuse to take your letters to Thornhill, and find the means of giving them to your betrothed. I go there every day to visit the housekeeper, and I can hold the duenna at bay while I talk with her young charge. She will scarcely suspect a grave and reverend seignior like me of playing the part of Mercury between two despairing lovers."

Sinclair grasped his hand, and warmly shook it.

"Thank you, Doctor. I shall regard you through my life as the best friend I have. Only aid me thus far, and I shall rescue my darling before her health and spirits are broken beneath the iron rule under which she has fallen. May is like a delicate flower which droops in a cold and ungenial atmosphere, and we must remove her as soon as possible from the harsh tyranny of which she has too long been the victim."

"She is delicate, but she has the fire and spirit of her race; and the dragon—as Nancy Bean calls her—will hardly have every thing her own way. Miss May Thorne can be an obstinate little spitfire, when she is borne down on too hard. I've seen her as dignified as a princess, small as she is, and again as wayward as a sprite. Don't think that you are winning a meek little bundle of perfection, for May is very far from being that."

"I should not like her half so well if she were," said Sinclair, laughing. "Those inane little women who are afraid to call their souls their own are not to my taste. If May had not been daring as well as trusting, she would never have written that letter which first interested me in her. When shall you go to Thornhill again, Doctor?"

"Early to-morrow morning, so you may have your missive ready."

"Thanks; I will do so. And now I will no longer intrude upon you."

"Of course you will call every day, Mr. Sinclair, and I cordially invite you to come. I must cultivate your acquaintance, that I may honestly plead your cause with Thorne, if the occasion to do so arises."

"I think you will find employment for all your eloquence, Doctor," said Sinclair, with a smile, "and I shall doubtless bore you with my presence oftener than you will care to see me."

The two parted mutually pleased with each other; and on the following morning, when Dr. Brandon drove out to Thornhill, he carried a communication from Sinclair informing May that, on every night for the next week, he would have a carriage in waiting not

far from the outer gate of the mansion, and if she could effect her escape, they would fly together and be united before her father could be warned of her evasion.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TREACHEROUS ALLY.

DR. BRANDON found his patient rather worse that morning, and in a towering passion. The "new woman," as she called the governess, had been and took her keys away from her, and given orders for all that was to be done, not only in the house but on the small and productive farm attached to the place. Mrs. Black professed herself familiar with agricultural details, as she was the daughter of a farmer. In house-keeping she was equally skillful, for she had kept her own establishment while her poor, dear Black lived, and he declared she excelled all her neighbors in management.

Mrs. Benson was helpless against her encroachments; she had lost her power of locomotion, but her tongue made up in some measure for the inactivity of her other members. She vowed to circumvent the governess in some way, and she set her brains to work to find the means.

To Dr. Brandon's inquiries, she replied:

"I aint a bit better with all yer comin', Doctor. Your rescriptions aint a mite o' use, and that ere Miss Gander jest does her own way without mindin' my demonstrances. Atween her an' the new woman

what's come to make us all stan' roun', I shall jest lose my interlecterbles."

"Mrs. Black would do you good service if she could make you stand on any terms, Mrs. Benson," said the doctor, with his eyes twinkling with amusement. "I am sorry that Mrs. Gandy is despotic, but she is a skillful nurse, and you had better keep her with you. If you will keep yourself quiet, you will soon be better, I assure you; but excitement is bad for you."

"Keep myself quiet, indeed, when everything is going at sixes and sevens. I can't depose on my bed, an' know what's goin' on in this house; 'taint no use for you nor nobody else to tell me to do it."

"You won't be responsible for anything that happens, since the rule has passed into other hands. Be quiet and get well as fast as you can, Mrs. Benson, for I scarcely think the new order of things will outlast your recovery."

"What makes you think that, Doctor? Ef I could b'lieve it I'd be on the condelesceng list afore many more days."

"I'll tell you in confidence; report says that Mr. Thorne will soon bring another wife home, and if he does, Mrs. Black's services will be superfluous. Mrs. Thorne can take charge of May and keep her in order."

"Goin' to be married, an' his wife barely six months in her grave! Ef it's true, Dr. Brandon, he's a deceivir an' the onreliablest o' men. I has nearly killed myself tryin' to please him, an' now he's goin' to bring somebody here that I'll hate to see wuss than I hate that new woman."

The doctor laughed.

"I hope you are not afflicted with the 'green-eyed

monster,' Mrs. Benson. That is a state of the case I never suspected before."

"It don't matter what you inspected: if she's a green-eyed monster, what does he want with her? I allers thought he had a eye for good looks."

"So he has, as he will prove to you one of these days; good morning. I must see the new importation and judge of her myself."

Dr. Brandon sent in his name, with a request to be admitted to the sitting-room of Miss Thorne. After some delay he was invited to proceed to it, and on entering he was presented to the new governess by her disgusted pupil.

There were abundant evidences of the new régime that had been established at Thornhill. The poems and novels that had solaced the solitude of May were all removed from the centre table, and in their places were treatises on mental and moral philosophy, and several elementary mathematical works. A black board had been placed over the mirror that hung between the two southern windows, and the priestess of that shrine stood beside it volubly demonstrating a problem she had chalked upon its surface.

May sat listlessly turning over the leaves of the book she held in her hand, secretly wondering if the gaunt embodiment of learning before her really expected her to make an effort to remember her instructions. She understood enough arithmetic for the common purposes of life, and beyond that she did not care to go.

When the visitor came in, May hastened with alacrity to interrupt what was so wearisome and unintelligible, and as she sprang forward to grasp the hand

of her old friend, the important note was adroitly placed in her possession. Then bowing low before Mrs. Black, Dr. Brandon courteously said:

"As an old friend of your pupil, and the family physician for many years, I ventured to ask admittance here, Mrs. Black. I heard of your arrival, and I did not like to leave the house without paying my respects to the stranger within its gates."

Mrs. Black made a stiff bow and said:

"I am glad you have called, Dr. Brandon, for I find that my task here will be no sinecure. My pupil pays no attention to what I explain to her. Her thoughts seem wandering off into cloudland, and after my most elaborate efforts to make her understand what I have taken every pains to demonstrate, she looks up vaguely and confesses that she knows nothing about it. If you can medicine this state of mind, I shall be very glad."

"I promise to do my best, Madame; but if you have undertaken mathematics I am afraid I cannot guarantee a cure. My little friend here has had a very desultory training, but as far as it has gone it was good, for her mother was an intelligent and loving guide to her."

"Oh, thank you for that testimonial, dear Doctor," said May, impulsively catching his hand and carrying it to her lips.

Mrs. Black looked shocked at this, and severely said:

"Miss Thorne, I expect from you more reticence of manner; such demonstrations are, to say the least, unpleasant."

"Not to me, I assure you," said the Doctor demurely. "May is an impulsive child, and must be dealt with as

such, Mrs. Black. If you draw the reins too tight, you know what is apt to be the result, and in her case gentleness will accomplish far more than severity. I hope you will be careful not to overtask her, for she is not very strong."

"It does not matter what tasks I set her; she does not seem inclined to learn any of them," replied the irritated teacher. "She sits as passive as a block when I am explaining a difficulty, and then rouses up to say she did not comprehend. I am afraid I shall have to resort to severe measures with Miss Thorne to bring her to a proper sense of the duty she owes herself and the respect that is due me as her preceptress."

"I see that you are not inclined to listen to my advice, Mrs. Black, but on one point I must be peremptory. In some sense I am responsible for the health of this young lady, for I have been her medical attendant from her birth, and I insist that her out door exercise shall not be curtailed. Whether the tasks are accomplished or not, May must take a long walk every day when the weather will permit."

"From all accounts, she has taken too many romantic rambles already," was the significant reply. "I was sent hither by Mr. Thorne to perform the important duty of watching over the mental and moral welfare of his daughter, and with your permission I shall pursue the only course that seems judicious to myself. There is a long gallery at the back of the house, and daily exercise can be taken on that. When Miss Thorne goes abroad, she will accompany me in the carriage; as I am fond of that species of locomotion, we shall often resort to it."

"That is better than staying within doors all the

time, but it will not suffice for one reared as my young friend has been. You will see her fade before your eyes, and grow more listless and inattentive every day. I have warned you of consequences, Madam, and now I will take my leave."

He bowed, turned to May, and as he took her hand, whispered:

"Get on her blind side, my dear, and remember that I am always your friend."

Her eloquent eyes only thanked him, and Dr. Brandon departed with his mind almost made up to assist in effecting an elopement, that the helpless girl might be rescued from the thralldom in which this stiff martinet of a teacher intended to hold her. But he could not see how it was to be successfully carried out, with such a woman as Mrs. Black always on the watch.

When the door closed on the visitor, that lady sharply said:

"Since you do not appreciate my efforts to enlighten your understanding, Miss Thorne, I will cease to make them for the present, and proceed to another department of my duty. You have kept up a correspondence with that clandestine adorer of yours, no doubt, and I am to get the letters and return them to their writer. Give me the key of your desk, if you please."

"No lady would pry into the private papers of another," said May, flushing with indignation. "My father could not have commanded such an indignity as that."

"I have my orders, and I shall obey them," was the cold response. "Surrender the key, or I shall take it from you."

May remembered the letter Dr. Brandon had given

her, and believing the woman before her quite capable of searching her pocket by force, she drew out the key demanded, and throwing it on the table, haughtily said :

“ Play the part of the detective, if you wish it, madam, but you will find nothing to reward you for your pains. As to myself, I do not choose to see my papers desecrated, and I will retire into my chamber while you make your inquisition into what does not concern you.”

“ In your present humor, perhaps solitude will be the best thing for you, so you may go,” was the reply.

May gladly left her to her unprofitable search, and partially closed the communicating door, leaving a crevice wide enough to enable her to see when Mrs. Black arose from the table on which the desk was placed. She thus gained time for the perusal of Sinclair's letter, which was hastily drawn forth, pressed to her lips, and then eagerly read.

A second time she went over its precious contents, and then a movement in the next room warned her that her freedom from espionage was ended. She hastily thrust the letter in her bosom, and took up a book, trying to assume the cold and impassive expression she chose to wear in the presence of her governess, when it was possible to do so.

Mrs. Black's sallow face was slightly flushed, and her dull eyes sparkled behind her glasses, as she approached and stood over her refractory pupil. She sternly said :

“ Where are those letters, Miss Thorne ? I must have them, and it is quite useless for you to attempt to withhold them.”

"Find them, then," said May, without looking up. "If such things are in existence, I shall not betray to you their hiding-place."

"*If!* Of course they are in existence, and in your possession. The young man himself stated that he had carried on a correspondence with you, and your father particularly enjoined me to send back his letters and to demand yours. You *must* give them up to me, there is no alternative."

"I think there is—I shall try masterly inactivity, but I have no objection to an opposite course of action on your part. There are my keys lying on the stand, you are welcome to use them if you choose. After invading my writing desk, I care comparatively little about having my clothes and ornaments examined."

"Insolent! How dare you speak thus to me?"

May looked up at the flushed face above her, and coldly replied:

"I am the daughter of this house, Mrs. Black, and not a menial to be addressed in such a manner as you presume to assume. I am not afraid of you, and bluster as you will, you will gain from me no clue to what you seek. There are my keys—use them if you see fit, but your search will be as unprofitable as the one you have already made."

Mrs. Black clenched her fingers nervously, as if they tingled to give the speaker a box on the ear, but as castigation was not enjoined by Mr. Thorne among the catalogue of her duties, she was afraid to attempt it. She emphatically said:

"I have had many unmanageable girls to deal with before to-day, but never have I encountered one as impracticable as you are, young lady. What do you expect to come to, I wonder."

"I expect to come to a state of beatitude by escaping from you and joining my lover," was the malicious reply, intended to exasperate the duenna still further.

"Good Heavens! what a young reprobate the child is! Go back to the sitting-room, and resume your studies, while I dive into every secret repository belonging to you. It is my duty and I shall religiously perform it."

"I dare say; religion is often found to be a useful cloak to those who have neither conscience nor sense of propriety."

With this parting thrust, May walked into the next room, arranged her disordered desk, and scribbled a reply to Sinclair, to be transferred to Dr. Brandon on the following morning if an opportunity were afforded.

She consented to all he proposed, but confessed her inability to find means of effecting her escape from the argus eyes that were ever on the watch. At the close of her epistle, she gave him a ludicrous account of the battle she was waging with her new companion, in the forlorn hope that she would become disgusted with the charge she had undertaken, and throw it up.

May had ample time to finish and address her epistle before Mrs. Black's investigations in the bed-room were over. Finding nothing there, she came to the parlor, in which, by this time, May was demurely seated, drumming her fingers on her open book, with both her letters securely concealed between the lining and outside folds of her dress.

With a spiteful glance toward her, Mrs. Black stalked straight to the cabinet, and said:

"I should have looked here first. Of course, this is the most likely place of concealment for what I am

determined to find. I wish you would pay more attention to your studies, Miss Thorne. Beating a tattoo like that will hardly assist you to memorize your tasks."

"I am not trying to do so. Like Marius, I am meditating on the ruins of Carthage," and she pointed to a box of dissected maps which Mrs. Black had brought with her to illustrate ancient geography. They had been thrown from the table, and so much dilapidated by the fall as to be rendered useless.

"Did *you* do that, Miss Thorne, to release yourself from the necessity of studying those maps?"

"It was an accident," replied May, carelessly, "but I am quite willing to pay you for them."

Mrs. Black glared on her, but said nothing more. She began to feel that she was getting the worst of it, with this young girl she had expected to crush down at once.

The search in the cabinet was as unsuccessful as the one in the chamber had been, and turning to May, the inquisitor sternly asked:

"Is there not a secret drawer in this piece of furniture? They are not often made without one."

"If there is you can search for it at your leisure, Mrs. Black. I am not the person to apply to for information on the subject."

"If you are not, your father is, and I will write to him to know what you refused to tell. The letters are here: I am convinced of that, so I shall look no further. When I hear from Mr. Thorne I can gain possession of them."

"Just as you please; by that time it will be of little consequence to me what is done with them."

"What do you mean by that?"

With sudden passion, May said :

"I mean that I shall be dead of disgust and ennui at being compelled to support your presence, or I shall be safe with the man that loves me, and can make me happy. I do not care what you write to my father, I will not attempt to master the tasks you have set me. I will not make the slightest effort to please you in any way, for such a low-bred, meddlesome woman I did not believe could be found among educated people."

Had a bomb-shell exploded at her feet, Mrs. Black could scarcely have been more startled than she was by this outburst. She sat several moments mutely regarding her pupil, for she was far too angry to speak. May did not drop her eyes before that steadfast stare, and an expression was in them which warned the woman that the Thorne spirit was aroused, and it would be well not to deal too harshly with her charge.

After a long pause, she coldly said :

"Your opinion is not very flattering, nor expressed in a lady-like manner, but I can afford to disregard it. As to your studies, if you refuse to permit the light of intelligence to be diffused through your imperfectly cultivated mind, it will be your own loss, not mine. I shall set your tasks, and if they are not properly prepared, I shall report your contumacy to your father—he can take such action in the premises as he sees fit. As to myself—I shall strictly perform what I conceive to be my chief duty, and that is, to guard you from every approach on the part of your lover. After the audacious speech you made not long ago, I cannot be too strict in my surveillance."

May made no reply to this long address—in fact she scarcely listened to it, for her thoughts had wandered

away to her letter and were busy with plans for placing it safely in the hands of Dr. Brandon. She could devise nothing better than feigning a sudden attack of illness, but she feared that her shrewd guardian would penetrate that ruse, and insist on treating her slight indisposition herself without the aid of a physician.

The weary hours passed on, seeming of interminable length to the unhappy girl. Mrs. Black was one of that class of teachers who lecture on each branch of knowledge they undertake to impart; and in spite of May's evident inattention, she went through the routine of studies appointed for the day—explaining and illustrating as she proceeded.

Under other circumstances, May would have listened with both pleasure and profit; but in the present state of her feelings, the monotonous tones of Mrs. Black's voice grated on her ears as the croaking of a raven, and she perversely closed her inner sense to all she was saying.

The dinner over, the governess read aloud from Rollin's ancient history, which the enforced listener thought as dry as the dust of the centuries that have rolled away since its heroes acted their little drama in this world of ours. When that was ended, May was told to practice, but music had no charms for her in the discordant state of her mind, and she coolly declined. Mrs. Black did not insist, for she saw that it would be useless; and May sat listlessly folding her hands while her companion uttered a monologue on the duties of children to their parents, and to the society of which they were preparing to become members. She was one of that class of women who *must* talk whether the audience be congenial or not, and all I have to say of such is, "heaven help the listeners!"

The supper hour at last rolled around, and the summons to the dining room was obeyed with alacrity by the weary girl. She wished that Mrs. Black could be induced to eat on until bedtime that her unwearied tongue might cease to wag. But the meal was soon dispatched, and May was returning to her prison when a message came from Mrs. Benson, asking her to come to her room.

Mrs. Gandy was the messenger, and May proudly said :

“It is useless to ask me to go anywhere without first obtaining the consent of my jailer. I am not a free agent, Mrs. Gandy.”

“Few girls of your age are allowed to be, Miss Thorne,” said Mrs. Black, with asperity, “but I have no objection to your going to see the housekeeper. I know it is not her fault that you have been led so far astray as you have lately gone. You can remain with Mrs. Benson twenty minutes, and I will avail myself of the opportunity to give some orders about the management of the place. My talents are of a versatile order, and I am glad to have a new field for their exercise.”

May did not stop to hear the end of her speech. Little as she liked Mrs. Benson, she found her presumptuous ignorance less repulsive than the everlasting stream of words that flowed from the lips of this insatiate talker. She hurried away, glad to get beyond the sound of Mrs. Black's voice, and soon found herself besides the couch of the invalid.

As soon as she came near, Mrs. Benson abruptly began :

“I aint no better, Miss May, so don't waste no time

in axin' of me 'bout myself, caze I've got suffin else to talk 'bout, an' we aint got much time. Miss Gander's gone to her supper, but she won't stay long, an' what I've got to dispatiate 'pon I don't want her to know nothin' 'bout. Come closeter, an' tell me what yer thinks o' the detrusion of that talkin' critter in this house."

May laughed bitterly.

"I think it as unwarrantable as your conduct to me was before she came. I have only changed keepers, that is all; but she is more detestable to me than you were."

"Hishe, Miss May, don't talk that way. I've repented of what I done to vex yer, an' I'm on your side now. Ef I kin help yer I'll do it, an' mebbe I kin, though I'm laid up here like a old busted steam biler."

The young girl listened with some surprise and a little incredulity. She hurriedly asked:

"What has brought about such a change, Mrs. Benson? Excuse me if I feel a little doubtful as to your sincerity."

"You need not do that, Miss May, for I disseverate to you that I am in airnest. Yer pa aint treated me right, an' I'm ready to show him that I kin do suffin in my turn as 'll make him think he'd better not ha' sent that palaverin' woman here to lord it over us all. I'm ready to help you all I kin to get out'n her clutches, even if you runs right inter yer lovyer's arms."

May blushed and laughed; but she eagerly caught at the straw held out to her, and said:

"If you will do that, Mrs. Benson, I will forgive all you have hitherto done to annoy me. I am wretched with that woman, and I do all I can to vex her; but that

is not much satisfaction, and I shall go wild if I have to listen to her harangues every day of my life. Upon your honor, will you help me and be true to me?"

"I'll help you circumvent her wi' all my heart, Miss May, for I hate her like pizen—a stuck-up, wizen-faced old chatter-box! She ain't no lady, even if she has the iddication to use all them long words she's so fond of. Ef you want letters sent to that young man as has lately ha'nted the groun's, I'll take 'em an' send 'em by Carrots. He knows better 'n not to do what I tells him."

"Thank you," replied May, still hesitating to trust her. "I shall be glad to send a note I have written to Dr. Brandon; I wish to consult him, but Mrs. Black will scarcely admit him to our parlor again, even if he should wish to come. If you will take charge of that, and give it to him to-morrow morning when he calls, I shall feel very grateful."

"Give it to me, my dear, and I will reposit it in his own hands without nobody bein' the wiser."

May drew forth the envelope, and with a lead pencil she took from her pocket, wrote on one corner:

"I can see Mrs. B. every day, and through her I can communicate with you.—M. T."

She then said:

"I am compelled to trust to you, Mrs. Benson—I can only hope that you will not betray me. Give my letters to Dr. Brandon himself, as Barney will hardly be a safe messenger."

"Just as you please—I only injested him for want of a better—I'll do anything to discomflustrate the doin's of that ere new woman."

The letter was transferred to Mrs. Benson; and the

time allotted her having expired, May left the room with a much lighter heart than she had carried into it. The most formidable difficulty to communicating with Sinclair was removed, and she was sanguine enough to believe that all the rest would be easy of accomplishment.

If she had seen the look of triumph on the face of the housekeeper as she left the room, her new hopes would have been dashed to the earth at once. There was an expression of malignant satisfaction in the eyes of Mrs. Benson as she muttered :

“If I am laid up and good-for-nothing, as that critter had the imperance to tell me I was, I’ve got the means now of puttin’ her under my foot, an’ I’ll do it too. I’ll play inter the hands of them lovyers an’ make ’em think they’s a-gwine strait to the heaven o’ mattermony. Miss May shill even git outside the house an’ on her way, but she shill find a lion on her path in the shape o’ her pa, what’ll bring her back quick enough, an’ give *me* back the confidence he has deposed in that hateful antelope.”—[Interloper, I suppose she meant.]

May returned to her captivity with spirits so much lightened that she played with some spirit, and even sang a few songs. She found this pleasanter employment than listening to the never-ending tirades of her governess, so she continued at the piano till ten struck upon the alabaster time-piece on the mantel, and Mrs. Black summoned her to retire.

Not the least part of May’s penance was being compelled to sleep in the same bed with her disagreeable companion. Mrs. Black was a pink of neatness and order, but that scarcely lessened the disgust with

which her young charge lay down by her side. The duenna took the front side of the bed, that she might be made aware of any attempt on the part of her prisoner to leave it, and May lay as far apart from her as possible, revolving schemes of escape, of which none seemed practicable.

It was something gained, she thought, to have won over Mrs. Benson as an ally, and unfortunately she did not dream of the treacherous use the housekeeper designed making of the power the helpless girl had placed in her hands. When Dr. Brandon received the letter that had been entrusted to his keeping, he saw no reason to doubt the housekeeper's good faith, and the two became the medium of communication between the divided lovers.

May's notes were necessarily very brief, for they were written at such moments as she could command when Mrs. Black's tiresome vigilance relaxed for a brief space. She had inherited artistic taste from her father, and she was allowed to cultivate it during the two hours of daily reading inflicted on her. When she could do no better, she used her pencil and colors to trace a few lines on the paper she surreptitiously placed upon her picture while the near-sighted eyes of her governess were bent on her book.

Thus the days passed on drearily enough to her, and still no plan had been arranged for her escape. The only recreation she was allowed was a short evening drive and a promenade of half an hour daily on the long piazza in the rear of the house. Health and hope both began to fail her under this discipline, and Mrs. Black found that she was suffering from a slow fever which threatened to consume her strength and probably end in something more serious.

She wished to try her own nostrums on her, but May refused to accept them, and Dr. Brandon was finally called in. He was shocked at the change in her appearance, and reproached the governess with the strictness with which the poor girl was confined to the house. She listened to him coldly, and replied that she did only what she had pledged herself to do, and May was not ill from want of exercise, but from perverse fretting after what could not be allowed to her.

The good doctor prescribed for his patient, spoke a few gentle and encouraging words in her ear as he bent over her, and went away in a passion. He met Sinclair near the gate awaiting his report in much anxiety: after giving it he gruffly said:

“Jump in, youngster, and while I drive on to town we must settle on some plan to get that poor child away from the stolid wretch that is slowly torturing her to death. I did not think anything could induce me to lend my aid to an elopement, but I shall do it in this case. Thorne is a cruel and hard-hearted father, and there is less excuse for him than for most men who shut up their daughters to keep them from marrying against their will. He ran away with his first wife, he should remember.”

“I was not aware that he had been married more than once,” said Sinclair in surprise.

“Oh, it’s an old story, and was a terrible scandal. He married some girl in Virginia when he was regarded as a wandering artist; but the old governor wouldn’t hear of receiving her as his daughter, and his son actually repudiated her, and married May’s mother a few months later. They pretended to prove that the

first marriage was a mere form, and the girl unworthy to assume the position to which she expected to be elevated, but that was all nonsense. Ada Digby stood by her, and she is one of the noblest women I know. If she was here now, half our difficulties would be over, but she is far away looking after some motherless children that have been sent to her by an old friend, and we must do the best we can without her."

"With you to aid me, Doctor, I shall not feel the want of other assistance. From your account of May, we must get her away from Thornhill as soon as possible, but heretofore we have been unable to hit on a plan of doing so."

"There is but one way: to drug that infernal clacking machine up yonder. I believe that woman has talked the child sick, but there isn't much the matter yet. It is only lassitude and depression of spirits that ails her. She will soon get over that when we have her away from that dull old house where she has been shut up so long."

"But how are you to drug Mrs. Black? *She* is not taking medicine from you."

"That is true, but she is particularly fond of Catawba wine, I have learned from Mrs. Benson, and takes a glass, or maybe more, every evening in place of tea. I shall prepare a bottle for her especial use, and I think after she has taken her usual quantity from it, she'll sleep the sleep of the righteous for at least a dozen hours. That will be your opportunity, and of course you will avail yourself of it."

"Dear sir, how shall I find words to thank you for at last consenting to act the part of our good genius. When will you arrange to carry out our programme?"

"As soon as May is able to play her part in it. I whispered a few words to her this morning, which will benefit her more than all the drugs in my pharmacopœia. This is Monday; on Thursday night I think we may arrange for the flitting. I wish I could go with you, but my professional duties forbid it; but Nancy Bean will be ready to accompany her young lady. Thorne will be furious when he learns the part I have taken, but I shall not care for that; he is unworthy to claim such a daughter as May, and I feel that I am doing right in assisting to place her in more humane and honorable hands."

"Thanks, Doctor; your confidence in me shall be justified. When May is installed in the pretty home I have prepared for her, you shall visit us, and witness the happiness your kindness will enable us to secure."

The two drove slowly onward arranging the plan of the elopement, of which Walter Thorne had already been forewarned by the perfidious housekeeper, and at that very hour he was preparing to travel back to his home to circumvent the plotters in the moment they thought themselves secure of success. Which would win was uncertain, for the irate father had a tedious journey before him, only a portion of which could be made by rail.

CHAPTER XX.

PREPARED TO ELOPE.

THE few words whispered by Dr. Brandon, and a note he found means to slip in her hand, did more

for May than the drops he left her. In the afternoon she arose and made her toilette ; for the first time for days she found herself alone, for Mrs. Black, in the belief that she was securely fastened to her bed for that day at least, had locked the door of the outer room and availed herself of the opportunity to go out on a tour of inspection, and interfere in every possible manner with the people employed on the place. She was that fearful nuisance, a talkative, meddling woman, and she was determined to make the most of the brief authority she had wrested from the house-keeper.

Thankful for this brief respite from her surveillance, May removed Sinclair's letters from the secret drawer of the cabinet, and collected such clothing as would be indispensable to her in the event of her flight from Thornhill. These she placed in a deep drawer which had already been so thoroughly investigated by Mrs. Black that she hoped it would escape further scrutiny. Wearied by these efforts, for her strength seemed of late to have deserted her, she threw herself pale and panting into a chair beside the open window, and awaited the return of her jailer. Suddenly a head was raised above the ledge, and the voice of Nancy spoke in subdued tones :

“It's me, Miss May ; don't be scar't. I saw the dragon go down to the farm to scare the men a-workin' there wi' her clatterin' tongue, an' I jest hustled up here as fast as I could to tell you it's all done fixed. You're to be ready Thursday night to go along of me to the kerridge what Mr. Sinclair will have down by the lower gate. He'll come up to the window an' help you out, an' I shill be somewhars near, you may be

sure. They means to give Miss Black suffin' in de wine she takes every night at supper. A nice habit that for a woman what has to set a ensample to the misfortunit gals she gits under her thumb. My! but you're looking pale and downsey."

"I am not well, but the news you bring me, Nancy, will act as an elixir vitæ. I feel better already. Dr. Brandon hinted this morning that something was to be attempted, but of course he could not explain. The brief note he left me from Harry told me nothing but that he would never rest till I was safe under his own protection. His plans have been settled to-day, I suppose."

"Yes—till you fell sick the doctor wouldn't do no more than take the letters, but he's got riled at the way that woman treats you, an' he's goin' to drug her wine. I jest run up to the place, hopin' I might git a chance to give you a hint, for I thought as you was sick mebbe the new manager would be a runnin' out arter the other people she torments some as well as you. *She* thinks she knows everything, and she tells the hands about siles and skientific farmin', an' the Lord knows what: she wants 'em to try some new-fangled ways of gittin' things out'n the yeth; but that aint no matter now—we've got suffin' else to think 'bout. Aint you got nothin' you'd like me to take keer on till you gits out'n the dragon's claws?"

May remembered the letters she was so anxious to save from the inspection of her enemy, and she hastened to take them from the drawer and place them in Nancy's hands with directions to take them at once to Sinclair for safe-keeping. This was scarcely accomplished, when the sound of the lock turning caused

Miss Bean to dart aside from the window and May to sink back in the recesses of her chair, trembling and panting for breath.

"You up!" exclaimed Mrs. Black. "I thought you were too ill to leave your bed, or I should not have gone away. Who have you been talking with, for I am sure I heard some one speaking as I came near the door."

"May recovered her composure and quietly said:

"Perhaps I have been talking to myself; it is a habit some people have, and I have been left enough alone to cultivate it."

Mrs. Black suspiciously regarded her, and then said:

"I am sure the voice was not yours. Let me look out of that window—I wish to ascertain if any one has had the hardihood to approach and communicate with you in my absence."

Certain that by this time Nancy had effected her escape, May arose and said:

"I will retire, not only from the window, but from the room. I have been imprudent in getting up, and I will go back to my bed again."

"You can lie on the sofa, if you please, as I wish you to be present at an investigation I am now competent to make. The secret drawer in the cabinet has been revealed to me by your father, and I am to take out its contents and keep them till he comes himself."

She glanced sharply out of the window as she spoke, but seeing no one lurking near, she took off the scoop-like bonnet in which she had gone out, and prepared for the search she intended to make.

May took possession of the sofa as she coldly said:

“You are welcome to the contents of the drawer, but papa can gain little information from blank paper.”

“If I find nothing else I shall be certain that you have availed yourself of my absence to remove the letters that must have been concealed there. If they are not forthcoming, I shall institute another search which, I fancy, will be more successful than the first.”

“I hardly think it will, but you can exhaust your superfluous energy as well in that way as in any other.”

May watched her with malicious amusement as she sought for the spring, found it, and drew forth the note-paper which had not been thought worth removing. Every sheet of it was held up to the light and as carefully investigated as if Mrs. Black expected to find sympathetic writing upon it. Finding herself baffled, she again took possession of May's keys, and went on another tour of discovery. Nothing resulted from it, and all her sharp questioning could not draw from her pupil any hint as to the disposal of the letters.

In the next three days May recovered rapidly—the hope that had dawned on her seemed to give her new life, and she looked forward to her release with a thrilling sense of joy that had long been a stranger to her heart.

The last week in August had come, and a heavy storm burst over Thornhill on the appointed day, but her courage did not falter, nor her determination to join her lover at all hazards fail her a single moment.

On this last day she dreaded the shrewd observation of her guardian, and she availed herself of the advice

Nancy had once given her to purloin Mrs. Black's spectacles. When that lady arose in the morning they were put on before she could accomplish anything, for she was so short-sighted that she could not distinguish objects across the room without them.

On the previous night, after she had laid them aside May managed to gain possession of them, and after the duenna was asleep she broke the glasses out and threw the gold frames upon the carpet at the foot of the bed. Laughing at her exploit, she then demurely composed herself to sleep.

The anger and dismay of Mrs. Black when she awoke and searched for her spectacles in vain, afforded her victim intense amusement, though she lay perfectly still and feigned to be asleep. May was presently shaken violently, and an angry face peered closely in her own, while a voice hissed in her ear :

“What have you done with my glasses ? for I know that you alone could have removed them.”

May rubbed her eyes and pretended to awake suddenly :

“What are you saying, Mrs. Black ? Why do you shake me in this way ? I do not like to be treated so unceremoniously.”

“I dare say not, but when you have played such a trick on me as to take my eyes away, I must demand that they shall be restored instantly. I can do nothing without my glasses, as you know.”

“Have you really lost them ? What on earth can have become of them, for nobody comes in this room after we retire ? ”

“Therefore you are responsible for them. Get up and find them for me instantly. They might be under my feet, and I could not see them.”

"You may have brushed them down with the bed-clothes as you got out of bed," suggested May good humoredly. "Of course, I will help you to find them, but I beg that you will not accuse me of having misplaced them. I will put on my slippers and institute a search at once."

Mrs. Black commenced groping about the floor, but May was too quick for her; she found the empty frames on the spot on which she had thrown them, and adroitly removed them beside the stand on which they had been deposited the previous night. She had wrapped the broken pieces of glass in a paper, and concealed them in the sleeve of her gown; they were thrown upon the carpet, and her foot came down upon them with a sudden crash.

"Oh, what a misfortune," she exclaimed. "I have found them, Mrs. Black, beside the table, sure enough; but I was so unfortunate as to step upon them, and they are quite useless."

She held up the empty frames in confirmation of her words, and the face of the angry and excited duenna was brought almost in contact with her own. In a voice choked with wrath, she said:

"Since I have been in this house you have done all that you could to annoy and defy me; but this is the culminating insult. I will never believe that you stepped on them by accident. But the loss of my glasses shall only render me more vigilant, besides, it is one that can easily be repaired; I will go in town immediately after breakfast, taking you along, and have them replaced."

"I shall be glad to take an airing, but I am afraid the day will prove too inclement. As to my agency in

destroying your glasses, I cannot see what I am to gain by doing so. Come, get in a good humor for once, Mrs. Black, for I promise you to be very good to-day. To repay you for the mischief I have done you, I will not be guilty of one thing to annoy you."

A little mollified by the first words of submission she had wrung from her young charge, Mrs. Black stood a moment undecided as to what course she should take, but as she knew by experience that nothing was to be gained by harshness, she finally said :

"Very well, Miss Thorne, we shall see how you will conduct yourself. By your behavior I shall be able to judge of your culpability in this affair. If there is any attempt to take advantage of my imperfect vision, I shall know what steps to take to keep you safe till your father arrives."

"Is my father expected at Thornhill?" asked May, with a sudden sinking of the heart.

"He will be here in a few days, and I am sure that, when he comes, I shall be glad enough to surrender the difficult charge I have undertaken. I thought I should like the life here, but your contumacy is too much for me, and I think I shall resign my situation. Your step-mother may take charge of you, for you will soon have one, it is said."

May made no reply to this piece of information, and Mrs. Black peered disconsolately from the window; for it was raining slowly, and the rising wind gave premonition of a storm that came on in wild fury at a later hour of the day.

As May had promised, she was very tractable and polite on this last day of penance; she listened respectfully to the oral instructions of her governess, and

even read aloud two mortal hours herself from that weary history of ancient times. With a natural feeling of triumph she saw that Mrs. Black had fallen asleep in her chair under the infliction, and she softly put the book aside, and began her preparations for departure.

A traveling satchel, that had belonged to her mother, was filled with such things as she had selected to take away with her, and concealed in the closet in her bedroom. She then went back to the sitting-room to find Mrs. Black still enjoying her siesta.

The supper-bell aroused her, and they went out together to the table. A fresh bottle of wine had been uncorked for Mrs. Black, for she declared that tea and coffee prevented her from sleeping, and it was her habit to drink light wine at the evening meal; very soon after it was over she complained of not feeling well, and as soon as they gained the sitting-room she threw herself upon a sofa, and in half an hour was sleeping profoundly.

May collected the few things she intended to take with her, placed her hat and shawl upon the table, and sat down in a tumult of fear and hope, to await the coming of her lover. What if her father should arrive earlier than Mrs. Black had said he would come—if he should arrest her flight and bring her back to her dreary prison? Her heart sank within her at the mere thought of such an end to her attempt to escape from his authority.

She sat listening to the weary sighing of the wind among the trees, the monotonous patter of the rain-drops, for the storm was dying away, and the moon was making feeble efforts to struggle through the

clouds that obscured her light. Ten o'clock was the hour appointed for her escape, and the lonely and excited girl thought it would never roll around. The hands on the clock seemed scarcely to move, and as the time passed, her agitation became almost uncontrollable.

Mrs. Black slept on, and as the night grew cool, May brought a shawl and spread it over her; for little as she liked her, she did not wish any evil to result to her from the trick that had been played on her.

A few moments later something was thrown against the window, and she saw a tall form standing outside, wrapped in a heavy cloak, with his hat slouched over his face. With a faint cry May sprang forward and threw up the sash; the man vaulted lightly into the room, and the overwrought girl uttered a faint cry of alarm, and sunk senseless at his feet.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE AVENGER ON THE TRACK.

A FOREIGN steamer was entering the port of New York, and as she moved gracefully onward the excited passengers gathered in groups upon the deck—some gazing upon the unknown land in which they hoped to find peace and plenty; others, with swelling hearts and dewy eyes welcoming again the sight of father-land—of *home*, with all its tender ties and sweet associations.

But among them was one who came back almost as a stranger to her native shores. The unformed and inexperienced girl who left them seventeen years before with a heart half-broken by the desertion of the one she loved, had little in common with the mature woman who gazed out on the beautiful bay with sad eyes and weary heart. But *that* sorrow had been buried long ago, and over its grave had grown rank tares of cherished vengeance which had been carefully nourished, and they were now ready to bring forth their bitter fruit.

The passage of these years had wrought a wonderful metamorphosis in the uncultured country girl; they had given her grace, accomplishments, knowledge of the world, and emptiness of heart, for she stood alone in the Babel of life around her, with few sympathies in common with her kind. The early wrong she had suffered had killed the life of her soul, and she cherished now but one absorbing desire—to repay the man who had desolated her young life in the same coin he had dealt out to her.

This purpose had brought Claire back to the land of her birth, and any one who looked at her as she leaned against the bulwarks and looked out with a vague and yearning expression of sadness on her expressive face, would have comprehended that she was a formidable antagonist to encounter in any game of hearts she wished to play successfully.

Claire was thirty-two years of age, yet few would have believed that over that fair head more than twenty-three summers had passed. Her lithe and graceful form, though perfectly rounded, possessed a latent strength of nerve and muscle not often found

among women in her class of life, and a power of endurance which the refined delicacy of her appearance would not have suggested.

She herself declared that the iron in her blood had hardened into steel by the pressure brought to bear upon her nature in the years in which her character was receiving its impress for good or evil. She was now a perfectly developed woman who felt her own power to accomplish whatever she undertook, and woe to him against whom that power was to be used, for she was merciless in the purpose which had brought her back over the wide sea to bring Walter Thorne to an account for the treachery which had blighted her opening life.

Her beautiful face, so brilliant with animation in the social circle, was now clouded and sad enough to make one believe that this protean creature *could* feel deeply and truly, if the right chord was touched; but of that there was little hope in the destiny she was hastening to embrace.

She wore a dark traveling dress of soft material that flowed to her feet in dainty folds, showing the graceful curves of her form, for it was in the days before hoops were worn that this Nemesis came on her vengeful mission to the land of her birth. Plain linen collar and cuffs, and a closely fitting bonnet with a long veil floating from it, completed her simple toilette. She had taken off one of her neatly-fitting gloves, and the hand that grasped the fluttering folds of her veil, though shapely and fair, had a nervous power in its long, slender fingers which was also characteristic. This woman understood herself; she had matured her plans, and she meant to carry them out, cost what it might to herself or others.

The early part of the voyage had proved very tempestuous—the ship on which Claire sailed out of the port of Havre with a favoring breeze was caught in a storm on the second day, and so disabled that she lay at the mercy of the waves, in danger of going down with every soul on board. The passengers preferred clinging to the wreck as long as there was safety in doing so, to trusting themselves upon the treacherous ocean in open boats.

They watched and hoped that some vessel would cross their track that could release them from their perilous position, but it was three days before one appeared on the horizon. Signals of distress were made, and after an hour of breathless suspense they were seen and responded to. By this time the storm had subsided, and an English steamship bore down upon them and rescued the passengers and crew—leaving the unfortunate *Vesta* to her fate.

Among the passengers that crowded the deck of the *Britannia*, Claire found two friends with whom she had been intimately associated at Baden during the previous summer, and who had subsequently visited her in Paris.

Mrs. Stanly and her brother, Robert Orme, had passed two years in Europe, and both acknowledged that to their acquaintance with Madame L'Epine they owed the most agreeable recollections of their tour. Their surprise and delight at recognizing her may be imagined, though Claire was by no means gratified by the encounter, much as she really liked them both. They eagerly offered her every attention, and during the remainder of the voyage, she was compelled to come out of her dreams and play the part expected of her

by these admiring friends. Thenceforward the weather was delightful, and Claire had no excuse for confining herself to her state-room, for she was never seasick.

Madame L'Epine stood apart from the others, but she was not alone : presently a gentleman who had been gaily conversing with a group of ladies left them, and drew near her. He was middle-aged, stalwart, and handsome, though an air of dissipation marred the dignity of his presence. His toilette was very carefully made, and he wore a large diamond on his breast, and another on the fourth finger of his left hand.

The sound of his voice aroused Claire from the reverie into which she had fallen, and she hastily drew down her veil, and turned to him.

This was Mr. Orme, who had fallen madly in love with Claire, and he now sought an opportunity to win her. She tried to avoid his wooing, but finding it impossible, she at last frankly stated her situation and her intentions to him, adding :

"The bond that binds me to my husband is not less indissoluble, even if it has been pronounced void by the decrees of man. I am a Catholic, and I hold firmly to the belief that whom God hath joined together, no merely human tribunal can put asunder. I am not what is called a pious woman. I am afraid that I am not a good one, but that belief is mine, and my actions will be governed by it. After this assurance, I hope that you will withdraw your attentions, and allow me to go on my way unmolested."

Orme silently regarded her a few moments, and then said :

"Have you, indeed crossed the Atlantic to seek that

recreant husband, madame ? for recreant he must have been to relinquish so fair and enchanting a being as you are. The fault must have been in him, not in you, for I find you a gem without flaw—peerless—resplendent.”

Claire laughed bitterly :

“ This is a strange conversation to hold here, and at this time ; but nobody is minding us, and we may speak as we please. *He* shall yet find me all that you think me—aye, and more, too. It is to win him back that I have come hither. When he cast me off, I was a child ; I had little education ; nothing, nothing but the fair outside semblance that fascinated him, and the passionate heart that found in him its ideal. I thought he loved me, and I—— Well, those days have long since passed away, and I will not refer to them ; but I have bided my time ; I have gained the culture he taunted me with not possessing. I have given up my life to one idea—all that I am I have made myself, that in time I might bring retribution to the man that so bitterly wronged me. I tell you this that you may cease to hope for a return to the love you have offered me.”

“ But of what nature is this retribution ? I do not see what you can do.”

Again her mocking laugh rang out :

“ I do not mind telling you, in this last confidential interview we shall probably ever hold with each other, for we shall soon part, and go on our different ways. I shall again find the man that cast me off ; make him adore me ; win back all the love he once professed for me, and then—*then* I will measure back the bitterness he has poured into my life, drop by drop, till it poisons every spring of joy or happiness in his nature. Only thus can I cancel the measure of my wrongs.”

Orme looked into her face and shuddered, but still it was beautiful and attractive to him, though the spirit of a baffled tigress seemed suddenly kindled into life, gleaming in her hazel orbs, quivering in her mobile lips. He gently said :

“It would be better for your happiness to accept what I can give you, than to pursue so bitter a purpose as that. But I can urge you no further, Madame L’Epine. In the future, I hope that you will find no cause to regret the course you seem determined to pursue.”

“If I do, no one shall ever know it. Sufficient to myself will I still be. You understand now why I can be nothing to you, Mr. Orme, and when we part, I hope that you will make no effort to trace my steps. The name I bear is a travestie of the one to which I am entitled : *that* has not passed my lips for years, but I did not relinquish my right to bear it in some shape, though my husband repudiated the tie that bound him to me.”

An expression of startled amazement came into the face of Orme, and he bent forward and peered into the face of Claire. With repressed excitement he exclaimed :

“My God ! can it be so ? Have I known you so long and so well without recognizing in you the divorced wife of Walter Thorne ? I see it all now—you have but translated his name into another language, yet dullard that I have been, the similarity never struck me before. You are Claire Lapierre, and if I could atone for the wrong I helped to consummate against you, a heavy load would be lifted from my conscience.”

His agitation was extreme, and every shade of his

rubicund complexion faded into a dull pallor. Claire regarded him with extreme surprise, mingled with annoyance. She haughtily said :

“ I will not deny my identity, but I had hoped to maintain my incognita till I revealed myself in my own time, to those I wish to know me. I shall be glad to understand the meaning of your words, Mr. Orme, for what connection you can have had with my past life is a mystery to me.”

“ It would not have been had I borne the name that was mine in my youth. I married Catherine Orme, and by the will of her father, I assumed her name when we took possession of his estate. My own is Robert Wingate, and you may remember when and where you have seen that name written at the close of a letter sent to Thorne to show to your father. I can only say, in my own defence, that if I had suspected that Walter meant to act unfairly by you, I would never have lent my aid to him in so questionable a manner. But he had served me in many ways, and I was willing to help him to evade the tyranny of his father. Besides, I was a little in love with the girl the old man made him marry after he gave you up. I tried to aid you in that shameful suit for divorce, but the power of Colonel Thorne rendered all my efforts abortive. Ada Digby may have told you of the struggle I made in your behalf, for I felt as if guilty of a portion of the wrong that had been done to you, and since the day the verdict was given, I have held no intercourse with Walter.”

He spoke rapidly as if afraid that his courage might fail him if he did not make his confession at once.

There was a flash from the dark eyes of the listener,

and for an instant she withdrew from his side ; but after a pause for reflection, she returned to her former position, and earnestly said :

“ I remember all that you refer to, and the attempt to serve me when I so sorely needed a friend, gives you a claim to my forgiveness for the previous wrong. Yet you owe me reparation, Mr. Orme, and it is in your power to aid me to obtain the retribution I have vowed to bring home to your former friend.”

“ In what way ? I will prove the sincerity of my repentance by doing anything that is reasonable ; that a gentleman may do. I owe Thorne some return, also, for marrying the girl I believe I could have made happy, and treating her afterward with most shameless and heartless neglect.”

“ Then we can come to an understanding, but not here. At the hotel where we can converse in private, I will unfold to you the service I require at your hands.”

He bowed, and after a pause, said :

“ I understand all now, and I shall no longer persecute you with professions of attachment. I hoped in you to find a cherished mistress for my desolate home ; a guide and companion for my two motherless daughters ; but now I see plainly that it is impossible.”

“ I a stepmother !—Heaven forbid !—at least to your children, for I wish them a better fate.”

“ Yet, if I understand you, you intend to renew your former relations with Thorne, after winning him anew, and you must be aware that he has a daughter.”

“ I knew it, certainly, but I have thought of her scarcely at all. What part she will play in the drama I intend to enact is of little importance. I may make

use of her, if I can set her in opposition to her father ; if I cannot do that, I shall set myself against both, and triumph over them. Can you tell me anything of this young girl ? ”

“ Very little. She has lived at Thornhill in seclusion with her invalid mother. I only know that her father has little affection for her, and he is not a man to care much for the happiness of those dependent upon him.”

“ So much the better ; I shall easily induce her to take sides with me.”

“ But what do you propose to do, madame ? ”

“ Wait and see : and, above all, preserve the secret of my identity. I shall unveil to you a part of my programme this evening—the rest, time will develop. I have waited seventeen years for the death of my rival, and now that fate has placed in my hands the power to act, I shall wring from that false man’s heart such atonement as my wrongs deserve. Have no fears for his life—I do not strike at that, for I would have him live to suffer as I have suffered.”

“ Of course, your secret is safe with me ; but you are undertaking that which will end in wretchedness to yourself, as to your victim. Thorne may merit all that you can inflict on him, but you will sacrifice much in obtaining your vengeance. I shall see you safe to your hotel ; that is, if you insist on going to one in place of accepting my sister’s invitation to spend a few weeks with her.”

“ I thank Mrs. Stanly very much for her wish to retain me with her a little while, but I have very urgent reasons for declining to remain in the city longer than is absolutely necessary. My destiny calls

me elsewhere, and I must follow its beckoning finger, even if it leads me to wretchedness and repentance."

Her voice softened a little, and Orme hastened to say :

"If you would only stay among us a few weeks, you might be induced to take a different view of your position. Such a woman as you should not throw away her fairest chances in life to follow up a chimera. After what you have said it seems madness in me to wish to marry you, but I do—I do most ardently. I would take you to my heart of hearts, and use every device known to the tenderest affection to make you forget the dream that you have nourished till it has overshadowed your true, womanly heart, and caused evil to spring up in your nature that is not native to it."

Claire drearily shook her head.

"It would be the worst mistake you ever made. One that would seal your own wretchedness, for *I* can make no home happy. In society, you have seen me gay, brilliant, charming, perhaps ; but in the seclusion of home it is far different. There I am sad, brooding, dreaming ever of the task I have sworn to accomplish—which has lain as an incubus upon my life for seventeen long years."

"Your decision is irrevocable, then ?"

"Yes—happily for you, it is. I shall be glad to have your escort to the St. Nicholas, and I will then show you in what way you can serve me. But when we part there you must seek me no more. Such business as we may hereafter have with each other can be settled by letter."

Orme bowed, and his sister, a stylish-looking woman,

still young and handsome, came up to them, followed by her two children, a boy and girl, of six and eight years of age, who were much attached to Claire.

Claire stooped and kissed the little girl on her pouting lips. The boy put up his mouth for a similar caress, which was promptly given, and, with a hysterical laugh, she said :

“ I wonder why I love children so much. It is the one soft spot left in my heart, and these little ones have found the warmest place there. I shall miss my pets very sorely, but I must submit to give them up, as I have submitted to so many other things that were hard to bear. Aunty cannot go with you my dears, but she is sorry to part from you, perhaps forever.”

“ What for ? ” asked the girl. Mamma wants you to stay with her, and so does Uncle Robert too, I know,” and she clung fondly to the hand she had taken.

Mr. Orme saw that Claire was distressed, and he drew the child away. The scene was ended by the approach of the ship to the pier, and a sudden rush of the passengers toward the landward side.

Half an hour later their adieux had been said, and two carriages were moving out of the crowd of vehicles near the place of landing. In one of them was Mrs. Stanly and her children, with their nurse on their way to their elegant residence on Madison Square ; in the other was Claire and Mr. Orme.

He had wisely determined to say nothing more to her on the subject of his love, but when he looked on her enchanting face, listened to the music of her voice, and thought it might be for the last time, his resolution suddenly failed him. He took her hand and passionately said :

“ Claire, be mine—I entreat, I implore that you will not sacrifice yourself to an idea of vengeance on a man who is unworthy to inspire you with any emotion save contempt. I will gain from Rome itself freedom from the imaginary shackles that bind you to him. Can you not see that in pursuing the course you have marked out for yourself you will seal your own misery in this world—your condemnation in the next? To accomplish what you propose to yourself, you must harden your own heart, stifle every tender and generous feeling, and become what I shrink from thinking of. Oh! for God’s sake, if not for mine, or for your own, think of what you may become, and recoil from the future evils you are ready to embrace.”

She coldly withdrew her hand and defiantly said :

“ If life is granted me, I will walk on the course I have marked out for myself, and nothing shall turn me from it. I have waited years for the opportunity, and now, when every obstacle is cleared from my path, I will not shrink from what I have so long contemplated. If I loved you, Mr. Orme, my answer would still be the same ; but, thank heaven ! my heart is dead to that passion. It cherishes but one ardent desire—what that is you already know.”

“ Then your decision is irrevocable ? ”

“ As irrevocable as the laws that govern nature. Assuredly as the sun will rise to-morrow, so surely will I do what I have set my heart on. Say no more, I entreat—nay, I command, for you are talking of love to a woman who believes that she is bound by ties that nothing save death may dissolve. The church cannot loose the bonds that were forged in the name of one infinitely higher than the Pope.”

"Tell me one thing, Claire—Do you love this man to whom you are ready to surrender the control of your life? Unless you do, I cannot understand why you so persistently have held to your heart the hope of a reunion with him."

"*Love him!*" she scornfully repeated. "Do you know so little of the human heart as to ask me that? Words could never convey to you an idea of the depths of contempt into which he has fallen in my estimation. If I loved him, I would shun him as a pestilence, but feeling as I do toward Walter Thorne, I shall become the minister of dire retribution to him. Do not tell me that I shall become hard and harsh and cold in doing this. I am all that now, and *his* baseness, his cruelty have made me what I am. I am unfit to accept the offering of your love, for in spite of your faults you have much that is noble and true in your nature, and you are far too good a man to be victimized by me. Go on your way, Robert Orme, and thank your good angel that Claire L'Epine refuses to accept the heart and home you offer her."

She turned from him, folded her veil over her face, and he felt that further remonstrance would be useless. After a pause that was very painful to Orme, he said:

"Since you deny me a near and dear interest in your fate, will you make clear to me in what way I shall be called on to assist your plans?"

"It is as well, or better perhaps, to do that before we reach the hotel," she wearily replied. "I hold a bond for a very large sum against Walter Thorne. I wish to transfer it to you that you may demand its payment, but not until I write and tell you when to act."

“But to what purpose? If you intend to marry him again you surely will not wish his fortune to be injured.”

“I *shall* be re-united to him—I will give him one month of devotion such as he lavished on me in our first union; and then—I will leave him to feel all the anguish of being forsaken by one he trusts. I will have his wealth taken from him, and for a season permit him to taste the poverty to which he left me when he cast me off. It was not his fault that I did not suffer for the means of living. His father offered me an annuity, which I rejected, but I never heard that Walter made any attempt to provide in any way for me. I should have accepted nothing from him, it is true, but that does not lessen my resentment that I was cared so little for as to leave me dependent on others, without an effort on his part to induce me to take from him enough to lift me above want. I went to France with my godmother, was educated at her expense, and afterward was taken under the protection of my half-brother, of whom you already know something.”

“But if I consent to act as your agent, what use will you make of this money, and how came the bond in your possession?”

“As a matter of justice, I shall provide for Walter Thorne’s daughter out of the sum you will receive, for a gambler is not likely to have much to bestow on those he should care for. The money was lost at the gaming table, and the son of my godmother was the winner. Andrew Courtnay rarely plays, but he did so when he met my false husband, that he might place in my hands a weapon to be used against him. I have

held it for more than three years, and it would never have been used if his last wife had lived. Her death placed him at my mercy, and I intend to use the power that is in my hands. I shall not utterly impoverish him—let that assurance suffice. When we reach the hotel I will give you the bond, with such directions as are necessary.”

Orme rather reluctantly said:

“Since I have given you my promise, I will not draw back; but it seems to me that you are preparing too heavy a blow for Thorne, shamefully as he treated you. His father was a remorseless old tyrant, and but for the power he wielded over Walter through his dependence upon him, I believe he would have been true to you.”

“It is too late to discuss that now—as he has sowed, he shall reap—that is the immutable law. You are bound to do me this service, for had it not been for the assistance you gave him to deceive my friends, I should never have been his wife. I demand from you such reparation as it is in your power to afford. Grant it without further remonstrance, for my course is irrevocably determined on.”

Orme earnestly said:

“If you knew how bitterly I have repented of that act—how anxiously I have desired to atone for it, you would see how impossible it is to me to refuse any request you may make of me, however unreasonable it may seem. You are avenged, Claire, for I love you, and I must aid you to accomplish your own wretchedness.”

The tones of his voice expressed even more than his words, but she calmly said:

"I thank you for your willingness to serve me in my own way. Seek a better woman than I am to make happy with the gift of your affections. When I am no longer near you, you will learn to forget me, for absence always conquers love."

As she ceased speaking, the carriage drew up at the private entrance to the St. Nicholas. In silence, Orme assisted Claire to alight, conducted her up stairs, and then went to secure an apartment for her. He soon returned, followed by a chambermaid, bearing the key of the room—which was across the corridor from the private parlor into which Claire had been shown. A porter brought up her baggage, and she said to her companion:

"Wait here a few moments, if you please, and I will bring you what I spoke of."

He bowed: and she went with the girl to her room. She unlocked her trunk, took from it a portfolio, and drew from one of its pockets the bond. An inkstand with a pen in it was upon the table, and she sat down, and wrote upon it the transfer to Robert Orme. By this time the servants had gone away, and closing the door of the room, she went back to the one in which she had left Orme. He was standing by a window looking down on Broadway, with a clouded and anxious expression.

As Claire came in he went forward to meet her—and they sat together on a sofa, earnestly talking, for several moments. With visible reluctance, Orme accepted the bond, and as he put it in his pocket-book, he said:

"Thorne will execrate me as the agent of his ruin, though he will recognise you as its author, for in your name is the transfer made."

“He need know nothing beyond the fact that the obligation has passed into your hands. It is a debt of *honor*, and as such Walter Thorne will not repudiate it. Men have curious ideas on such subjects, and *that* money will be paid if the most dishonorable expedients are to be resorted to, to raise it without utter ruin to himself. I believe you now understand fully my wishes with reference to this long delayed settlement.”

“Yes; I perfectly comprehend them, and I will carry them out to the best of my ability. I will have the money deposited in the bank of Philadelphia to your credit, and after that I wash my hands of the whole affair.”

“Certainly; beyond that service I have no claim on you, but I shall always remember it with gratitude. We must part now; I shall remain in New York but a few hours, and I need not further trouble you. I can make my own arrangements for leaving, if you will send up the clerk to me as you pass through the office. Accept my thanks for your attentions thus far, and assure Mrs. Stanly that I shall always remember her with grateful affection.”

“Is that all? Will you give me no clue to the route you intend to pursue? to the steps you intend to take to renew your old influence over the man you are bent on bringing to ruin and despair?”

“I can do neither, and it is a waste of sympathy to bestow it on him who wrecked my life and made the woman he put in my place scarcely less wretched than he rendered me. I met her once; I pledged my word to her then to avenge us both, and I shall certainly do it. Our parting here is final, and it is better for you that it shall be so. Adieu, Mr. Orme; I trust to your

honor and that of your sister, to keep my secret, and to make no attempt to follow me in the devious path it may be necessary for me to pursue."

She arose and offered him her hand ; he raised it to his lips, fixed one long and earnest glance upon her lovely face, and without uttering another word, left the room.

In a few moments the clerk came up, and Claire informed him that she wished to go on the night train to a small town in New Jersey, where she knew Ada Digby was to be found. As she had no company, she requested him to make the necessary arrangements for her departure ; he courteously assured her that everything should be attended to, and a carriage be in waiting in time to convey her to the train.

She then sat beside the window looking out on the crowd of hurrying pedestrians below, wondering if among them all was one more desolate, more hopeless than herself. She pitied herself, she blamed herself, yet she clung with strange pertinacity to the one idea which had animated her life through so many years.

That night she went on her way to the little sea-coast village in which Miss Digby's last letter had told her she was to be found. She stopped at a station on the way, and hired a carriage to take her to Seaview, as the cottage was called.

CHAPTER XXII.

OLD FRIENDS.

IT was a bright and beautiful day in June when Claire reached her place of destination: a romantic cottage situated about half a mile from a straggling little village lying on the sea shore. The low-roofed house was embowered in trees and covered with trailing vines, but its front windows commanded a fine view of the ocean. A large yard in front was filled with shrubbery, and flowers bloomed in profusion on every side.

Claire alighted at the gate and moved up the winding walk, wondering if the letter she had written to Miss Digby before leaving Paris had yet reached her. The place looked solitary and unoccupied, and she began to fear that its temporary mistress might already have left it.

Her doubts were set at rest by the sudden opening of the door and the appearance of a lady upon its threshold. Her figure was tall and commanding, her features clearly cut and regular, and there was an air of decision about her which showed that she thought and acted for herself. Her dress was perfectly plain and fitted accurately to her erect figure, and the dark hair that lay in smooth bands beneath her plain lace cap was slightly threaded with silver. The expression of calm repose, mingled with sweetness, which characterized her face, inspired confidence and affection in all who were thrown in contact with Ada Digby, for she it was who glanced with some surprise at the figure advancing with quick steps to greet her.

She came forward a few paces, and in her pleasantly modulated voice said :

“ I thought I heard a carriage stop at the gate, and I came out in the hope that it brought a dear friend to my arms. But man is born to disappointment, and of course woman too in a much greater degree. Since you are not the friend I expected, I hope that you bring me some news of her, Madam, and if you do you shall be most welcome to Seaview cottage.”

“ I hope that I bring my own welcome with me, Ada. I do believe that you have forgotten me, though I should have known you anywhere, or under any guise. You have scarcely changed at all, but from your looks I must have undergone a complete metamorphosis.”

In another moment Claire was clasped to the heart of her friend, who kissed her many times and then held her at arm's length and gazed in her face, exclaiming :

“ How could I know you, Claire ! You left me a broken-hearted child, and you come back to me a beautiful and fully developed woman. The years that have brought you only to perfection have whitened my hair and faded my cheeks, while to you they have given all that is most precious to women.”

“ Not *all*, Ada ; there are things more precious than charms of person, which I have failed to attain. *They* were your heritage, and they are better worth possessing than the poor ephemeral beauty of which you seem to think so much. You may have grown a little older, but you still look good and true as in those days in which you took to your heart the forlorn stranger who had no friend to stand by her but yourself. Ah ! sister of my soul, what would have become of me in that

dreary time but for your sustaining kindness? I shudder to recall that past, yet I have come hither to live it over again; to renew the struggle; but this time to come off conqueror."

Miss Digby looked searchingly at her, and drawing her forward, said:

"Let us go in, and when you are rested and refreshed, we will talk over those days. Oh, Claire! it makes me young again to see you standing fresh and fair before me as if time had stood still for you, or only lavished on you greater charms. You were a pretty and attractive girl, but now you stand before me a bewilderingly beautiful woman; you have come hither to make that beauty a snare and a curse to him who once trampled you in the dust and mire of his own selfishness. Yet, dear Claire, success will be fatal to you. It will be worse than death to place yourself in the power of that hard and reckless man. I have your last letter, and I am ready to do anything to prevent you from consummating the sacrifice you meditate."

"It would be a greater sacrifice to give up the object of my life," was the quiet reply. "But we will talk of this later. Just now I can think of nothing but the joy of being with you once more—of hearing the ring of your true voice."

"Thank you, my dear, and pardon me for referring to your private affairs in the first moment of meeting; but your letter only came to me yesterday, and since it was read I have thought of little else than you and your strange purpose in coming back to your native land. Let us go in and make ourselves comfortable. I will send my servant to bring in your baggage."

They entered a wide hall from which doors opened

on either hand, and Miss Digby threw back one which gave into a large room with two deeply embayed windows looking toward the sea. This was fitted up as a sitting-room and library; but Claire noticed that one of the cases which had been intended for books was filled with bottles of medicine, among which were found a few standard works on the science of which Miss Digby was so fond. In the centre of the floor was a round table, on which was an open writing-desk and a basket of needle-work.

The soft summer air, laden with the perfume of flowers, was wafted through the room, and after taking off her bonnet and shawl, Claire sunk into the large chair her friend drew forward for her, and with a smile said:

“The arrangement of this room is perfectly characteristic. I remember your old passion for botanical studies and for practising medicine. Since you removed to this place I suppose you have become the liberal dispenser of your life-giving elixir, as you were in L——”

Miss Digby laughed:

“I have done what I could for those who are too poor to employ a regular physician; and I do not think that I have ever killed any one yet. My preparations are simple and mostly made by myself, for I have fitted up a small laboratory and become quite a dabbler in chemistry.”

“Ah! if you could only have known my brother, Ada. He and you would have been congenial spirits, and your strong practical sense would have counteracted the mania to which he fell a victim. I wrote to you of the delusion which absorbed his fortune, and finally cost him his life.”

“Yes—it was a sad history, and one in which I deeply sympathized—but in place of correcting his fantasy, I might have fallen into it myself, for at times nothing seems impossible to the chemical enthusiast. Luckily for me, new cares have been thrust upon me, and the time I once devoted to my studies and experiments has been almost absorbed by the charge I have undertaken. I wrote to you that I have two young girls living with me, the daughters of an old friend. One of them is an invalid, and it was for her benefit that I came to this cottage by the sea.”

“I remember—you did not tell me who they are, but your reticence led me to guess it. They came from New Orleans, you said, and you once told me of a friend you had there who had, in your youth, been dearer to you than a brother. Are they not Mr. Balfour’s children, Ada? I hope their father is not dead.”

A faint flush came into the cheek of Miss Digby, but her eyes brightened as she said in a subdued tone:

“No—George is not dead, though he has borne grievous afflictions. The history of his family is one of those tragedies that are enacted sometimes in New Orleans during the prevalence of the yellow fever. It is two years this summer since it raged there as an epidemic. Mr. Balfour was compelled to leave his home on important business in the early part of the season; at the time of his departure little apprehension was felt, for the city had been free from the ravages of the pestilence for several years. It broke out within two weeks after he left his home, with great violence. Mrs. Balfour was one of the first to be struck down with it; it is a harrowing story, Claire, and I will make it as brief as possible.

‘ When poor George heard at Louisville of the sickness in New Orleans, he hurried home as fast as steam could take him, but when he reached it he found his house closed, his wife dead and four of his six children sleeping beside her in the cemetery. The second and youngest daughters still survived, and they had been removed from the infected atmosphere and taken to Carrolton by a friend. He found them there, the elder half broken-hearted at the losses she had sustained, and the younger too ill with the fever to know or care for anything.

“ Mr. Balfour’s anxiety to save the two darlings left to him, sustained him under this awful bereavement, and as soon as Louise was strong enough to bear removal, he returned to Louisville, and took boarding for himself and children at a farm house a few miles from the city, where he hoped the pure air would restore the strength of the little girl.

“ But the disease left behind it such effects that the physicians declared that sea bathing alone could be of any permanent benefit. He then wrote to me, and appealed to my benevolence to receive his motherless children, and to do for them what the claims of his business would not allow him to do.

“ Of course, I consented, for George has never forfeited his right to be considered by me; we were both victimized by a hard, and selfish man, and I scarcely blamed him for the course he pursued when he thought that I had been false to all the pledges I had given him. Alice and Louise came to me, and I used all my skill as a nurse to restore the little one. Mr. Balfour purchased this place, and I removed to it, in the hope that the sea air and bathing would renovate

her health; she has improved much, but she is still delicate, and requires constant care."

"It is a sad story indeed, but I hope that good to one I love will result from it. I can easily understand that the charge you have undertaken is no burden to you, for your active mind must have employment, and your benevolence leads you to expend your energies in the service of others."

"Don't flatter me, Claire; you know of old that I hate the semblance of it. I will leave you now to make yourself comfortable, while I order a cup of tea, and something nice for you after your long drive."

Claire detained her by laying her hand on her arm. "I have breakfasted, Ada; I had a cup of coffee, and some bread and butter at the station at which I got off. I could not eat just now, even if a Lucullian feast were spread before me. Indeed I need nothing but your pleasant face and dear voice to cheer me up a little."

Miss Digby sat down beside her, saying:—

"Then you shall have them, my dear, and I must say that the sight of your fair face is welcome to me as the morning sunshine. I scarcely anticipated seeing you so soon, for, as I told you, your letter from Paris announcing your intended return, only reached me yesterday. Oh, Claire! have you well weighed the purpose hinted at in that letter? Do you comprehend what you have traveled all this distance to face?"

Claire lifted her eyes to the questioning ones bent upon her, and steadfastly replied:

"I have weighed everything, and I would sooner relinquish life itself than give up the fulfillment of that long cherished dream. I have waited long for the death of the woman who stood in my way, and when

I saw it announced in an American newspaper which reached my hand by chance, I knew that fate pointed out to me the path I must pursue, and my resolution was at once taken. I crossed the Atlantic with a matured purpose, and I am here to accomplish it."

"But Claire, when I tell you all that unfortunate wife of Walter Thorne suffered at his hands, you will shrink from taking the position from which death has released her. He treated her badly almost from the first day of their marriage. He accepted her at the dictation of his father, and he was not generous enough to conceal that fact from her. The life he and Agnes lived together was terrible, for Mrs. Thorne was spirited, and resentful, and nothing kept her with him but the daughter that was born the first year of their marriage. Walter threatened to take the child from her if she left him, and she staid to have her heart broken, and her temper embittered, by the harsh indifference he manifested not only toward her, but toward his daughter."

The listener shivered, and grew perceptibly paler, but she replied:

"I shall avenge her. He never loved her—he *did* love me. I know that, although he was base enough to give me up as he did. I shall rekindle that passion—give it sweetest food for a brief season, and then return to his lips the bitter cup of which he made me drink."

"Claire, this is madness. As you value your peace do not seek Walter. Remain with me for a season, and then go back to the land in which you have so long dwelt as happy as it is permitted the most of us to be. Bury in oblivion the memories connected with your native land; it will be best—indeed it will."

Claire arose, and lifting her graceful form to its utmost height, impressively said:

“I will risk *everything* to regain the position from which I was so ignominiously thrust—to obtain the power to torture him in his turn. Walter Thorne adored me once when I was far less attractive than I know I now am, and he shall come back to me with more than the old love. He shall become my slave, and then I will repay him not only for my own wrongs, but for what that unfortunate woman suffered at his hands.”

The concentrated force and bitterness with which the last words were pronounced made her friend shiver. She earnestly said:

“Claire, you will lose yourself in this world, and the one to come, if you carry out your schemes. If you succeed you will be wretched, for no woman can be happy in such a destiny as you are hastening to embrace.”

“Happy! No—I never dreamed of such an impossibility as that; but it matters not. I shall regain the position that of right belongs to me; I shall force him to acknowledge before the world the wife he divorced, and whose good name he suffered to be vilified that the end might be attained. You spoke of his daughter—tell me of her, for I wish to know something of her.”

“For the last few years I have seen little of May, for Walter thought I took sides with his wife, and he brusquely told me that my room was better than my company. It is now three years since I was at Thornhill, and May was not allowed to come to me. She was then a pretty, pleasing-looking girl of thirteen; she had enjoyed few of the pleasures of childhood or

youth, for she has been immured in the solitary country house in which she was born. She was educated at home, chiefly by her mother, who found the only consolation for her unhappy marriage in the devotion she gave to and received from her daughter. At that early age she was shy and reticent, but I think she has inherited a strong will and a spice of the perverseness of both her parents. But under proper training, I believe she would mature into a noble and reliable woman."

Claire's lip curled as she cynically said:

"So my step-daughter is likely to prove a thorn in my side, too. No matter—I shall go on my path all the same, and find means to make her my friend by giving her some of the enjoyments of which she has so long been deprived. If she is pretty, so much the better; her mother's fortune, if it is secured to her, will make her rich enough, and I shall find some one to marry her before very long."

Miss Digby silently regarded her for several moments; she then impressively said:

"If you place May's destiny in the hands of a good man, it may be well enough to remove her from her father's house, for she has never been happy in it. I believe that you would never consent to give this poor girl to one that is not worthy of her, Claire?"

"Yes—you may trust me that far. But after all, Miss Thorne will make her own choice, and I must not be held responsible for the result. All I can do is to take care that she shall have the opportunity to select a suitable husband for herself, and for that I think she should be grateful."

Again there was a long pause, which was broken by Miss Digby:

"But how do you propose to gain access to Walter? He lives in solitude at Thornhill for months at a time, and then he rushes into a vortex of dissipation as reckless as his seclusion has been severe."

"I have not yet decided on the means, but they will be found. I thought at first of seeking the position of governess to his daughter, for of course she cannot be left without a lady to take charge of her; but the vow I made to myself long ago stood in the way of that. I will never enter that house again till I do so in triumph as the acknowledged wife of Walter Thorne. Can you tell me of his whereabouts now?"

"I fancy that would be difficult to do, for he wanders from one scene of gayety to another, and he has been absent from Thornhill for several months. Dr. Brandon writes to me occasionally, and tells me all that he thinks will interest me. You remember him as the physician who attended you when you were ill at my house?"

"Yes—I have a faint recollection of him. What disposition does Mr. Thorne make of his daughter during his absence?"

"You will scarcely believe me when I tell you that he is hard enough to shut her up at Thornhill, and not allow her to see any one but the servants. Except on Sundays, she is not permitted to go beyond the grounds; then she goes to church, accompanied by the housekeeper, an ignorant and pretentious woman, entirely unfit to be May's companion."

Claire triumphantly said:

"Then I shall find an ally and not an enemy in my step-daughter. For her sake, Ada, you should aid me to regain my true position at Thornhill. I will take

this poor girl under my protection, and at least try to make her happier than her father seems to care to do."

"I see that you will have your own way, Claire, cost what it may to yourself. I have warned you of what you may expect, but if you do win back your recreant husband, I trust that you will try to make him a better man, in place of embittering him still further. I believe that I can trust to your good instincts to act a conscientious part by both father and daughter."

Claire faintly smiled—she ambiguously replied :

"You may trust me to do justice to them both, Ada. More than that no one has the right to expect. I am interested in that lovely and neglected daughter, and I shall at least endeavor to promote her happiness."

Voices were heard beneath the windows, and the face of Miss Digby brightened as she said :

"My young people have come back from the beach. They usually take a long walk every morning, accompanied by a large Newfoundland dog as their protector. Louise has improved wonderfully since we came to this place ; and by the time her father arrives, I hope to present her to him with restored health."

"I love children, and I shall be glad to make the acquaintance of those in whom you are so deeply interested."

"One of them is no longer a child—Alice is nearly seventeen, and Louise is four years younger. They are dear, affectionate companions for me, and give an interest to my life which it has long lacked."

A tall, slender young girl, with delicate features and pale brown hair, entered the apartment, followed by a dark, sallow child, with large dark eyes, and hair

of the same color, which hung in short spiral curls around her head. There was no resemblance between the sisters, and Claire quickly made up her mind that Alice resembled her Northern father, and Louise her Southern mother.

They hesitated a moment when they saw a stranger, but at the bidding of Miss Digby came forward without any appearance of shyness and were presented to her.

"My dear Alice," she went on, this is Madame L'Epine, of whom you have often heard me speak. She is just from Paris, and you and Louise can chatter to her in French as much as you please. I am sure you will soon like and take an interest in each other."

"Yes, indeed," said Claire. "I know that we shall be the best of friends."

The dog, a magnificent specimen of his kind, came bounding in, and pranced around the chair of the newcomer with the air of bidding her welcome. He then paused in front of her, looked into her eyes with almost human intelligence, and crouched at her feet as if satisfied with his survey.

Louise placed her hand confidently in that of Claire, and in a low, musical voice said :

"I know I shall like you, for I can always trust to Fidèle. He never comes near any one, to fawn on them, if they are not good and true."

"Your dog's instinct must be superior then to the judgment of men, for they often find it very difficult to decide that question, my dear."

"If Fidèle had to judge of another dog, perhaps he might make a mistake too," replied the child, gravely ; "but he never is wrong in his choice of friends among

the people that come here ; but he does not often take to any one as he has to you."

"I am much flattered by his approval I am sure, but the name you have given him seems more appropriate to a lap-dog than to such a splendid creature as this."

The sallow cheeks of Louise flushed ; she said :

"He is faithful—then what better name could be given to him ? I wanted to give him the name in English, but papa liked Fidèle best. You don't know yet how well he deserves it. I hate lap-dogs. They are little whining nuisances that require as much attention as a baby ; but this pet is a great, strong, helpful fellow that is ready for any emergency. He dragged me out of the surf once when I had got beyond my depth, and if it hadn't been for his presence of mind I might have been drowned."

Claire laughed at her quaint manner of expressing herself. She said :

"I cordially agree with you in your opinion of poodles, but this is the first time I ever heard of a dog's presence of mind. That divine gift is supposed to be the attribute of man alone, and forms one of the distinctions between the human and the brute creation."

"I know, Aunt Ada has explained all those things to me ; but I am sure that Fidèle reasons and thinks. He understands every word I say to him, and he knows that I am praising him now. See how he wags his bushy tail and looks up at me with his knowing eyes."

The dog here arose and gravely put his paws upon the shoulders of the speaker, looking at the same time in her face with a grateful tenderness that was almost human.

Claire laughed, and said :

"I am almost a convert to your opinion, Louise, for your canine friend seems really to comprehend you. Sir Walter Scott and the Ettrick shepherd both tell some wonderful things of the sagacity of dogs; and their faithful attachment often puts to shame *man's* inconstancy."

The young philosopher gravely replied:

"Some dogs are as faithless and stupid as some people. I should not expect anything of a barking cur but that he would snarl at the bone thrown to him, and run off to hide and gnaw it alone: mean men are like him; but my dear old Faithful belongs to another type of dog, as you and I to a better class of people."

"Thank you, dear; I shall appropriate the compliment, whether I deserve it or not."

"Come, Louisa," said Miss Digby, "you and your four-footed follower have occupied enough of Claire's attention, for the present. Run off now and tell Sally to set luncheon in the dining-room, and let me know when it is ready."

Louise obeyed, and Fidèle stalked after her with stately gravity, as if comprehending that he had been dismissed, and a little offended at it.

"Did you have a pleasant walk, Alice?" inquired Miss Digby.

"It was delightful when we first went out, but the sun became oppressive very soon, and I wished to return; but Louise was gathering sea mosses, and as it is only of late that she seems to take much interest in any employment, I did not like to bring her home before she found some pretty specimens. She left her bucket on the lawn, and after lunch I promised to assist her to arrange them."

“You were quite right, my love, not to take her away from a pursuit that she seems to like. The inertia produced by her long illness is gradually disappearing, and a few more months by the sea-side will, I hope, entirely restore her natural activity and playfulness.”

“I am sure they will, and when papa comes you will give him back his little pet quite well and strong. Ah, Madame L’Epine, you do not know how much we owe to Aunt Ada,” she went on, turning toward Claire. “After those dreadful days of which I cannot bear to think, Louise and I were left with no mother—no female friend to care for us; and although papa did all he could for us, you may imagine how forlorn we were. He feared to take us back to the South, and he appealed to this good friend of his, and she has been more than a mother to us. I am happier since I came to Seaview with Aunt Ada than I ever hoped to be again.”

“I do not wonder at that, for Ada has the knack of making those around her contented. I only hope she will not leave her work half done.”

Alice looked at her inquiringly, and Miss Digby flushed slightly, but she also smiled as she said:

“That is not my way, you know. What my hand findeth to do, that I set myself to with a will, regardless of the comments of the outside world. But here is Sally ready to say that she had anticipated my orders.”

“Yes, ’m, please,” said the neat-looking servant. “I knew the lady had traveled all night, and I set to work to get up a nice cup of tea, with *eat-setrys*.”

“Which we shall devour, of course,” said her mis-

tress, good-humoredly. "Come, Claire, let us adjourn to the dining-room and do justice to what my hand-maiden has prepared. We do not dine till four o'clock, as I have changed my hours for meals to those to which my children were accustomed before they came to me. I have tried in every way to make them feel the change from their Southern home as little as possible."

"You have succeeded in making a new home for us almost as delightful as the one that was so badly broken up," said Alice, affectionately. "I believe I should say it is quite as happy, if I did not think of poor papa, and feel sorry for his loneliness so far away from his children. When Louise is restored to health, we can go to him; but then we must leave you alone, Aunt Ada, unless you will consent to go with us. Don't you think she will have to live in New Orleans yet, Madame L'Epine?"

"I cannot see any other solution to the difficulty," replied Claire, with a mischievous glance at Miss Digby.

Alice nodded intelligently, and the four gathered around the table, chatting pleasantly, while they partook of the delicacies Sally had provided for them. Claire gave them a description of her late voyage, and made herself as charming to the little company around her as she would have exerted herself to be in the most brilliant coterie.

Louise, after making a dainty repast, sat listening to her with charmed ears. She suddenly said:

"I never intend to get married—I mean to be free to go and do as I choose, as Aunt Ada and Madame L'Epine are. I shall travel and see the world, as you have, Madame, and afterward, settle down to do good, as Aunt Ada does."

"But Madame L'Epine has been married, Louise. You seem to forget that," said Alice. "And maybe Aunt Ada will find some one to please her yet. She is handsome enough, and good enough, I am sure."

"She is too good for any man, I know, and too sensible to take one, even if she liked him a little. I don't want Aunt Ada to care for any one as much as she does for you and me."

"So selfishness lies at the foundation of your objections, after all," said her sister; "but a child like you should not express herself so freely about her elders. I know what I hope for, and if you knew how affairs stand, you would not speak as you did just now."

"Well, how do they stand? I always like to see my way clearly before me, Alice."

Miss Digby here arose, and said:

"My dears, you are both talking of what you do not comprehend. I have a weighty matter to consider, in which you are both deeply concerned, but you may feel assured that I will do what is best for your happiness. There is a letter for you, Alice, which you can take to your own room and read to Louise. I thought it best to withhold it till after luncheon."

Alice eagerly held out her hand, and on looking at the address on the envelope, said:

"It is from papa. Come, Louise, let us go at once, and see what he says; he is coming back soon, I know, and when he comes, he means to stay."

The two girls were soon seated beside a window in their own pleasant chamber, which communicated with the one occupied by Miss Digby. The two heads bent together over the long and tender epistle written by their father; and many exclamations were uttered by Alice as she read, but Louise spoke not a single word.

When they had finished, the elder one said :

“Is it not delightful, Lou, that papa and Aunt Ada may make up their old love quarrel, and be married yet? I do hope that she will accept him.”

“*I don't,*” was the emphatic response. “I love them both, but I think it is all nonsense for two old people like them to think of getting married. It's undignified. Papa has had one wife, and that is enough for one man. Aunt Ada is happy as she is, so why should she wish to make any change?”

“You absurd child! Don't you see that unless Aunt Ada marries papa, she cannot remain with us? If she gives us up, we shall be as forlorn as we were in that farm-house in Kentucky. You know how miserable we were, and how sadly we missed mamma till Miss Digby consented to receive us. I am afraid that you are very ungrateful, Louise, for she has done more for you than most mothers would.”

“No, I am not ungrateful, but I am hurt to think that papa loved Aunt Ada first, and may be better than he loved our own dear mamma. I am jealous for her if she is dead, and I don't like him to console himself by going back to the one he may have liked best in his heart all the time our poor mother lived. If he had not told us about that in this letter, I should not have felt so badly about it.”

“Now Louise, you are wronging papa most shamefully. You know how good, and tender, he was to mamma—you can remember that though you were so young; and *I* can remember that he never denied her the gratification of her most unreasonable wishes. You know that mamma was not satisfied if she did not have her own way in everything, and pa gave up to her always, sooner than see a cloud on her brow.”

"Yes—I know all that, and I see now that he gave her indulgence, in place of love. It was'n't a fair exchange, for she thought there was nobody in the world equal to papa."

"Of course she did, and there *is* nobody better than he is. Even if he loved Aunt Ada when he was a young man, and a misunderstanding, as he says, broke off their marriage, he never let mamma know it. Now that she is dead, why shall they not seek each other again?"

"But mamma *will* know it, for the angel spirits that have left us come back to us again, and see what we are doing. I often wake in the night with the impression that mamma is near me, and I am sure she is."

"I too, often dream of her, but it is only a dream, and it is my conviction that if she could really come back, and see how necessary Aunt Ada is to you, and me, she would be glad to know that she will become our stepmother."

"Stepmother! it is an odious name, and they are always cruel to the poor children they get under their authority. I have never read a story about one yet that it did not show her up as a tyrant. I don't want Aunt Ada to be tempted to treat us badly."

"You are an unreasonable, and ungrateful little baggage, Miss Louise Balfour. Your brain is full of crotchets, but this is the most ridiculous of them all. Do you think it possible that so good a woman as Aunt Ada could change her nature because she assumed the position of my father's wife?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. I only want them to stay as they are. Papa must be fifty years old, and Aunt Ada can't be many years younger. If they have

lived without each other so long, I can't see any reason why they should get married now. Fidelity is my motto ; and papa should be faithful to the memory of our mother. I shan't give my consent, so there ! ”

“ I don't suppose they will trouble themselves to ask it,” said Alice, dryly. “ Fond as they both are of you, you will not be permitted to stand between them and their happiness. I did not believe that you would be so silly and self-opinionated, spoiled as you have been.”

“ If they treat me that way, I will mope myself to death, and I shan't care if I never do get well again.”

Alice arose, and abruptly said :

“ I won't stay here to listen to such ingratitude,” and she left the room.

Louise threw herself upon the bed and wept herself to sleep. She was a singular child, and often difficult of comprehension, but she was really tender-hearted, in spite of her wayward and capricious temper.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PERVERSE CHILD.

WHEN the two ladies returned to the library Claire waited for the confidence she felt Miss Digby would give her. In the early days of their acquaintance, to strengthen the deserted wife for the future that lay before her, Miss Digby had related to her the disappointment that had permanently influenced her own life, and tried to show her how possible it was to rise above such a misfortune, and find peace and contentment, even if love were denied.

After moving restlessly through the room in a manner quite unusual with her, she paused in front of her friend and asked :

“ Do you remember the romance of my life, Claire ? The sad story of my broken hopes, and proud struggles against the love it was no longer right to feel for the husband of another woman ? ”

“ I vividly remember every detail given, and I hope that I have returned to witness the *donouement*. There is no longer any obstacle to your happiness, for your rival is also dead, and unlike me, you have no cause of bitterness against your early lover.”

Miss Digby sat down, and leaned her head upon her hand. She presently thoughtfully said :

“ I believe it will be right to follow the impulses of my own heart, ridiculous as some people would say it is for a woman over forty to dream of renewing the romance of her youth. I have not lived single for this end, but because all other proffers of affection have filled me with distaste to the thought of marriage. Till lately, I believed that my destiny was irrevocably settled—that nothing would induce me to give my hand to any one ; but my life will be dreary if these children are taken from me, and with their father’s feelings towards me, I cannot remain near them except as their stepmother. I believe it will render them happier if I consent to stand in that relation to them, and I know that George will be dreadfully disappointed if I refuse the offer his last letter contained.”

“ I can see no reason why you should do so, Ada. Mr. Balfour was a tender husband to the woman he so precipitately married, but in his heart I have no doubt he preferred you.”

"Don't say that, Claire, for it would lessen my respect for him, and consequently his chances of success. He says himself, in his manly and noble letter, that he learned to love the woman who devoted her life to him, very tenderly,—that he mourned her death sincerely; and I am sure he speaks the truth. His early affection for me assumed the phase of tender friendship, and if he could have brought his wife and myself together, he would have done so with perfect certainty that his own affections would not have wandered from their legitimate owner.

"But Josephine is dead now—his life is lonely, and he asks me to brighten it. He cares for the welfare of his motherless daughters, and he says that no other woman in the world can fill the place of her who is gone, save myself. He does not offer the passionate love of youth, but he says that we may find together more happiness than if we dwelt apart, and he judges very correctly that it will be a very severe blow to me to be separated from his children."

"Oh, Ada! what tame and spiritless wooing! It is more like asking you to be his housekeeper, and duenna to those girls, than anything else. I scarcely think I would take him if he has grown so prosy as that. You are still handsome enough to inspire a grand passion, and your warm heart would appreciate and return it."

Miss Digby soberly said:

"Such demonstrations on either side would be simply absurd. I do not forget that George and myself have passed into the 'sere and yellow leaf' of our autumnal days: but he is not prosy. Mr. Balfour is a man of large experience, warm heart, and great intelli-

gence. He has kept pace with the progress of the age in which we live, and is that *rara avis*, a man engaged in mercantile life who seeks other sources of pleasure and information than those that are to be found in his ledger and daily newspaper. He has accumulated a handsome fortune, and has retired from business that he may pass the remaining years of his life in a manner suited to his tastes. He asks me to share his life, and the question is, shall I promote his happiness and my own by consenting?"

"As to that, there can be no question; for the home of which you are mistress must always be the abode of contentment and good feeling. If that is all you have to consider, Ada, you need not hesitate as to your decision. After what you have just said of Mr. Balfour, I cannot doubt that you highly estimate him, and will find happiness in a union with him. In life, as in nature, autumn is often the most beautiful season, and I hope that yours will be gilded with a sunshine as soft and resplendent as that of which the poet has so sweetly sung."

"Thank you, my dear. After all, I am afraid, like many others, I am only seeking encouragement to follow my own inclination to do a silly thing. I respect and admire George Balfour, and if associated with him daily, all my old love for him would bloom again in renovated beauty. Therefore, I must accept him, or sever myself from those I am most deeply interested in, and go upon my lonely way."

"You can never think of that alternative, for you are too important to those young girls to give them up lightly, even if you cared less for their father than you evidently do. I can see nothing silly in renewing the

vows of your youth, and giving the man you have always loved the right to claim you as his wife."

"But I have not always loved him. I have got into the habit of thinking of him as the property of some one else, and I cannot make up my mind to reclaim him as my own. I shall have ten days to think it over, for Mr. Balfour was about to leave New Orleans, and he will scarcely be here in less time than that. I am to give my answer in person, and if it is a refusal, he will leave for Europe within another week, taking his daughters with him, in the hope that the German baths may benefit Louise."

"And in that event you will be left desolate. Follow the dictates of your feelings, Ada, for there is nothing absurd to me in this long deferred union of congenial hearts. These young girls seem very fond of you, and they will be unhappy if separated from you. I can see no reason why you shall not accept Mr. Balfour, and many in favor of doing so."

"You are a very considerate confidante, Claire," said Miss Digby, with a faint smile, "for you insist on what you know is the most agreeable thing for me to do. But I am not quite certain as to the consent of both the girls. Alice is sensible, and practical, and she will gladly accept me as her stepmother, but Louise is different. She is a fanciful and peculiar child, and she remembers her mother so vividly that I am afraid she will resent the suggestion that her place can be filled by any one."

"You would not surely permit her objections to have weight with you? It will be for her good above all others, if you consent to assume the responsibility of a mother toward her."

“She may not view it in that light, and I own that I shall very reluctantly consent to marry her father if her sensitive nature will be wounded by such a step. She talks to me for hours of her mother, and the tender reverence she cherishes for her memory I should be loth to outrage in any way. I confess that my own heart plays the traitor to me, but I cannot make up my mind to give my heart to Mr. Balfour, without the full and free consent of both his children.”

“If that is all, they must and shall give it. I will take Louise in hand myself, and bring her to reason. I do not often attempt to influence grown up people without success, and with a child like her, I shall have few difficulties to contend with, I flatter myself.”

Miss Digby shook her head, and smiled faintly.

“Louise is obstinate in some things, and not easily influenced; but she is a dear, lovely child, in spite of the defects in her temper, and I think she is a rarely gifted one. Her health is still so frail that I dread any unusual excitement for her.”

“Never fear—I shall deal with her as gently as a ‘sucking dove;’ but I will bring her round yet to my way of thinking. The idea of sacrificing, to the caprice of a spoiled child, your well-grounded hope of a happy and useful future, seems to me infinitely more absurd than your union with your early lover. Excuse me, Ada, but if I speak at all, it must be with freedom.”

“Of course; I grant you perfect freedom of speech and action while you are with me. We will discuss this subject no more, if you please, till Mr. Balfour arrives. By that time, I shall have duly weighed all my doubts and scruples, and found out what they are worth.”

“I only entreat that you will not permit the fantasy of Louise to tip the scale on the wrong side. She needs you far more than you do her, and she will be a most ungrateful little puss if she cannot be brought to see how much she will gain by claiming you as her guide and friend while she is developing into womanhood.”

“I hope you may find her amenable to reason, but I fear that such will not be the case. In the letter I gave Alice, her father informs her of the purpose of his visit here, for I requested him to have no concealment from his children. I wish them to know what is impending, and testify their willingness to accept me as their stepmother, before I agree to assume that position.”

“My dear Ada, it is like you to consult the wishes of every one before your own; but I scarcely think that Mr. Balfour will be very grateful to you for placing the success of his suit at the mercy even of his own daughters.”

Alice had entered the room while Claire thus spoke, and she could not avoid hearing and understanding her words. She walked straight up to Miss Digby, kissed her tenderly upon her forehead and lips, and blushing deeply, said:

“Excuse me for coming in so suddenly, Aunt Ada, and hearing what was not intended for my ears; but let me assure you that one of your children, at least, is most happy in the prospect of having so good and affectionate a mother as my dear papa has found for her.”

Miss Digby returned the caress, and said:

“Thank you, my love; I never had any doubts as to

your approval of your father's choice ; but how is it with Louise ? She knows as much as you do ? ”

“ Yes—we read papa's letter together ; but Lou is strange, you know, Aunt Ada, and I am afraid she thinks that you will care more for him than you do for her.”

“ Jealous is she ? If that is all, I shall pay little attention to her vagaries. Remember, Alice, that this affair is by no means settled—I am only taking your father's proposal under consideration ; but as there was every reason why I should accept it, I requested him to write to you as he has done.”

“ I only wish it was settled beyond a doubt, for I cannot bear the thought of being separated from you, dear aunt ; and I know that only as my father's wife can you remain with us. Louise will come to her senses when she sees the alternative, for she loves you as dearly as I do. She is in one of her ways now, and I left her to take her pout to herself.”

“ That was the best thing you could do. Louise is very impracticable at times, and her bad health has given her such freedom from restraint, that I fear we shall have trouble with her. She is strong enough now, however, to be made to understand that her will is not to be the law of every one in the house. In asking me to marry him, your father has consulted her welfare as much as his own wishes, for she requires the constant care of some intelligent and reliable woman. She cannot expect Mr. Balfour to remain single to please her ; and if I do not become her stepmother, she may rely on it some one else will.”

“ I shall suggest that to her,” said Alice, laughing, “ though I do not believe there is the remotest proba-

bility of such a thing. You are the desire of papa's heart, and if he cannot get you, he will trust no one else to rule over his children."

For the next few days, it seemed as if Louise intended to carry out her threat to mope herself sick again. She listened to the kind and gentle remonstrances of Miss Digby in silence, but made no effort to brighten up; and the only answer her friend could obtain from her when she talked tenderly and earnestly with her was:

"You must not take poor mamma's place. I could not bear it."

She would have shut herself up in her own room, but this Miss Digby would not permit. She compelled her to follow the usual routine of her life; and with bathing, walking, and studying the tasks her friend inexorably required of her, Louise found it rather difficult to sustain the injured *role* she had chosen to adopt.

Claire, as she had promised, undertook to influence her, but signally failed. She lost patience with the obstinate child who would not be made to believe that the happiness of two people in the autumn of life could be promoted by a union between them. She refused to see how annoying her opposition was to Miss Digby, and how vexatious it was to her sister. With much effort did Claire refrain from expressing her opinion of her conduct; but she did so, as she knew that embroiling herself with Louise would only add to her friend's perplexity.

Affairs were in this unsatisfactory state when, at the close of the month, Mr. Balfour arrived.

After sunset, the whole party had strolled out on the

beach—Louise apart from the others, with her dog for her companion. As they were returning, a gentleman came to meet them ; and Alice sprang forward and ran into his arms, exclaiming :

“ Oh papa, papa, how glad I am to see you once more ! and you are looking so well and handsome ! ”

The last epithet Mr. Balfour certainly deserved in spite of his fifty years. He was a tall, finely-formed man, with a slight tendency to *embonpoint*, which, however, did not as yet impair the grace of his person or take from his step the elastic spring which in his youth had shown the buoyancy of his nature. His features were not perfectly regular, but the bland and noble expression of his face more than atoned for that. His hair was abundant, but blanched almost to silvery whiteness—it seemed to crown his finely-formed head as a halo, and harmonized with his clear, healthy complexion in a wonderful manner.

This was Claire’s decision as Mr. Balfour came forward, carrying his hat in his hand and bowing with the grace of a courtier to the stranger to whom he was presented. Miss Digby welcomed him with the quiet courtesy habitual to her, but nothing could be gathered from her manner in those first moments of meeting, though he looked earnestly and inquiringly at her as he took her hand and warmly pressed it.

Louise had lagged so far behind them that they were compelled to stop and wait for her approach ; but she seemed in no hurry to join them, although she must have recognised her father ; Mr. Balfour cast a swift glance of inquiry at his elder daughter. She nodded intelligently in response, and he understood at once how affairs stood. He hurriedly said :

"I will go to meet Louise. Do not wait for us, Ada, as I have something to say to her. I will bring her in presently in a better frame of mind, I hope."

The three ladies strolled slowly back to the cottage, and Mr. Balfour rapidly approached his perverse child.

"Louise," he reproachfully said, "is it possible that after an absence from you of nearly eight months, you care so little to see me as to linger on your way as you have just done?"

Louise threw herself into his outstretched arms, and burying her face upon his breast, burst into a passion of hysterical sobs. He tenderly caressed and soothed her; but when she could speak, her first words pained him deeply, for they proved that the radical defect in her character was still unchecked, in spite of the gentle influence of the friend from whose training he had hoped so much.

"Why should I hurry to meet you when you came here not on my account, nor even on that of Alice. Aunt Ada is all you are thinking of—but for *her* you would not have come at all, perhaps. How can you think of such a thing as putting a stepmother over your children? of giving mamma's place to any other woman?"

With gravity that was almost stern, Mr. Balfour put her clinging form away from him and said:

"This is truly a charming welcome from my own daughter; reproaches in the first moment of meeting I scarcely expected even from one as wayward as you, Louise. I had hoped that your selfish desire to be first in the hearts that are dear to you had been conquered by this time."

"Selfish!" she repeated, passionately—"how can you be so unjust? I love you best, and I have the right to claim as much affection from you as I lavish upon you. It is but just."

"On what grounds do you expect a warmer place in my heart than Alice? She is my loving and obedient daughter, ready to promote my happiness in the manner most agreeable to myself, and you, a mere child in years, have the audacity to set yourself in opposition to me in the first moment of reunion!"

"Alice does not love you as I do—she cannot—no one can. She has forgotten poor mamma, and is ready to accept the new one you are going to give her. I cannot love Aunt Ada, but I shall hate her if I have to call her mother."

Mr. Balfour was silent a few moments; he was evidently struggling with deep emotion, but he presently said:

"Louise, you do not know how deeply you wound me. The love that has no care for the happiness of its object is of small worth in my estimation. Your sister proves her affection for me by her conduct, but you only show me that the trait you unfortunately inherit from your mother still influences every act of your life. Josephine was a good wife to me, and I cherished her tenderly, but her exacting and jealous temper embittered many hours of my life. I bore from her what I will never bear from you; so understand and accept your position at once."

The black eyes of the girl flashed defiantly upon him, and she rebelliously said:

"You not only go back to your first love, but you can speak in such terms of my dead mother! But Ada

won't have you unless both Alice and I consent, and I will say no—*no* to the bitter end. I won't have a stepmother."

She looked like a fiery little demon as she thus defied him, and he regarded her with astonishment with which intense anger was mingled. With quiet firmness he replied :

"You will have a true mother in Ada Digby, and she is the only woman I know who can mould and transform you from what you are into sweet and gentle girlhood. I had hoped that much had already been accomplished in that direction, but I am sorry to see that little radical change has been effected. If you perversely place yourself in opposition to the union on which my heart is set, I shall send you away to boarding-school alone—*alone*, mark you, for Alice is contented here, and I will not remove her from the friend she had the sense to appreciate at her just value. You shall go among strangers, and feel that you are in disgrace, till you are willing to atone for the obstinacy that is ready to mar the peace of others to carry its point. I gave up my own wishes to your mother, but I shall not to you, you may feel assured. Ada Digby *was* my first love, and always my fast friend. We were separated by the treachery of a man who has long since gone to his account, so I shall spare his memory. Before I was aware of how deeply we had been wronged, I married your mother. I did it in a fit of pique, I do not deny ; but when I learned the true state of the case, I did not weakly repent of what I had done. By that time the tender, almost adoring love of your mother for me had won its legitimate reward. We were as happy together as it is given to

most earthly creatures to be, but I suffered at times from the groundless jealousy of an exacting temper on the part of my wife. Alice knows this if you were too young to remark it; but it did not estrange me from Josephine. It was her weakness, and I forebore toward her when it was manifested."

"But you have forgotten her! You did *not* forget Miss Digby though, and you sought her as our protectress, that you might have an excuse for asking her to marry you as soon as decency would permit," said the audacious child.

"Louise, you try my forbearance to the utmost limit of endurance. It is three years since your mother died—look at me; see my whitened hair, the lines upon my face, and then, if you can, repeat the assertion that I have forgotten the wife with whom I dwelt in harmony and affection for so many years. The stroke that deprived me of her, and of my children, was a heavy one to bear; but I struggled on beneath the burden for the sake of yourself and your sister. How ungrateful you are to me for all my care and indulgence, I regret to see. I have not forgotten your mother; her memory is sweet and pleasant to me; but she can no longer minister to my happiness—she can no longer watch over the children whose welfare is so important to me that I have made up my mind to do that which is best for them and for myself, by making Ada Digby my wife, if she will consent to accept the heart that so long strayed from its allegiance to her, and found happiness with another. You know too little of life to understand that this course is not incompatible with the most tender and reverential respect for her who is among the angels; and if she

could look down upon us, she would approve the course I am about to take."

"You can't take it unless Ada says yes, and she won't say it as long as I say no," reiterated the girl.

"Then it is your purpose to defy me?"

"Yes. You are too old, and so is she, to make yourselves silly about each other. I won't countenance such ridiculous folly if Alice chooses to do it."

"I think that you are a rare specimen of young America to dare to speak to me in this disrespectful manner. I see from your improved appearance, that your health is re-established, and I shall not hesitate to subject you to such an ordeal as will bring you to your senses. You can pack your books, and such articles as you wish to take with you to school at once, for I shall remove you to Philadelphia immediately, and place you with Madame S——. She has had much experience with refractory pupils, and after a few weeks of her discipline, I think you will humbly sue for forgiveness, and be willing to purchase it on my own terms."

"Ah! indeed! So I am to be sent out of the way that you may do your love-making without a looker on, who would see all the absurdity of two elderly people billing and cooing with each other."

Angry as Mr. Balfour was, and impertinent as this speech was, he laughed aloud at it.

"There is little likelihood that Ada or I shall make fools of ourselves, Louise. The interest we take in each other is founded on the deepest respect, and if we marry, it will be with the conviction on both sides that we are doing what is best for your future welfare, you perverse child. I shall say nothing more to you on

this subject, for I have borne from you as much as I will allow you to say. Here we are at the cottage, and you may commence your preparations for departure as soon as you please. To-morrow afternoon I shall take you away, and after settling you in your new quarters, return here to prosecute the wooing you think so supremely ridiculous."

"I am sure that I shall not object to being out of the way at such a time," was the cool reply, "but the wooing will come to naught unless I give my consent. Madame S—— may torture me if she chooses, but she shall not wring it from me. In India women are burned on the funeral pyre of their husbands, and I think it as little as you should do to remain faithful to the memory of the wife you married in your youth. This going back to your first love only proves to me that you cared for her all the time."

"You are certainly the most outspoken and audacious child I have ever encountered. The only torture to which you will be subjected in your exile will be the remembrance of your own ingratitude to the truest maternal friend that a motherless girl could possess. Do not flatter yourself that *your* absurd opposition will long weigh with Miss Digby. She is a woman of sense and discrimination, and when she finds your undutiful will arrayed against mine, she will very properly weigh the wishes of Alice and myself against it, and give me her hand without regard to you. If you decide finally that you cannot be happy with your stepmother, I can send you back to Louisiana to your Aunt Moreau, to become a part of her family."

The eyes of Louise dilated at this proposition, and for a moment she seemed quite taken aback by it. She sullenly said:

"Aunt Adele will not care to have me, but you can do as you please. It don't matter much what becomes of me after you and Alice devote yourselves to your new idol. I shall die down there, but you will be rid of me. I can lie down with the others and be at rest."

Her father turned and regarded her with an expression that should have touched her, but it did not; she sprang past him, and entered the house before he could reply.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE YOUNG REBEL DISPOSED OF.

WHEN supper was served Louise declined making her appearance; she sent word that she was packing up to go away, and did not wish for anything. Miss Digby cast an inquiring glance at Mr. Balfour to which he replied by saying:

"I will explain why I have decided to remove Louise from your care when I can speak in private with you. It is as well for her to keep her room this evening, as her society would scarcely add to our enjoyment."

Tea and toast were sent in to the refractory girl, and she would have been both mortified and astonished, if she could have seen how lightly her defection was regarded by the circle that assembled in the library after the evening meal was over. Claire found that Miss Digby's estimation of Mr. Balfour was not exaggerated by her partiality for him. He talked agreea-

bly, and intelligently, on any topic that was introduced, and was always ready to listen with deferential attention in his turn.

Alice sat with her hand clasped in that of her father, listening to him as if his words were those of an oracle; and such they were to her, for she loved and revered him beyond every other living creature. She remembered her mother very tenderly, but the affection she had felt for her was far less deep and absorbing than that she cherished for him. Alice could remember many things that Louise was too young to have remarked, and she knew that to Mr. Balfour's consistent forbearance toward his wife's peculiarities, the peace of their home had been mainly due.

Of the six children given to them, the mother made especial idols of the three that resembled her own family, leaving for the others only such notice as her caprice led her to bestow upon them. The eldest and fourth daughters and her son were the favored ones; but the father, seeing the difference that was made between his children, endeavored to atone in every possible way for the injustice done to the neglected ones, and those three young creatures clung to him with an affection that almost became an idolatry.

That the Balfour family was a happy and united one, Alice knew was due entirely to the just and affectionate spirit of its head, and maturer thought enabled her to comprehend the daily sacrifices made by her father to keep the sunshine of peace unclouded in his home. She rejoiced truly in the promise of happiness before him in a congenial union with one she had learned to love almost as dearly as she had loved her own mother, and she had little patience with the vagaries of Louise.

Alice would have gone to her however, and assisted her in her preparations for departure, but this Mr. Balfour would not permit. He told her that Louise voluntarily secluded herself on this first evening of his return, but he could not dispense with the presence of both his daughters.

A cottage piano stood in a recess in the library, and they had music, the sounds of which filled the young rebel in her distant room with anger and dismay. They were really enjoying themselves without her, and she wept with indignation, and self pity, feeling herself a martyr to the cause of her dead mother, while she hardened her heart toward her living father.

Claire played concerted pieces, and afterward the others sang, the deep rich bass of Mr. Balfour blending finely with the well-trained voices of Miss Digby and his daughter.

The moon rose over the sea, casting tremulous shadows upon the restless waters; the night was perfectly still, and Claire drew Alice away with her that the explanation she knew Mr. Balfour was most anxious for, might be made. Wrapping light shawls around them they went down to the beach, and walked to and fro in sight of the house.

Mr. Balfour placed himself on the sofa on which his companion sat, and with a smile, said :

“Your friend is very considerate, Ada, and I am very much obliged to her, I am sure, for affording us this early opportunity to commune with each other. I hope you have had time to weigh the proposal I made to you, and that you are prepared to give me a favorable answer.”

“Yes—I have reflected on it, and I will be frank

enough to say to you that I think we could be very happy together even at this advanced period of our lives, if all parties interested in our union were satisfied. But it is not so, as you doubtless learned from Louise this evening. Absurd as her opposition really is, I must respect it as springing from her strong affection for her own mother."

"My dear Ada, it is much more probable that it is the offspring of her intense obstinacy of character, and her egotistical desire to be *first* with all those she loves herself. I have had to deal with these traits before; I have suffered severely from them in one I was bound to consider, but my daughter shall establish no such tyranny over me as I bore from her mother. I did not choose to have my children reared in an atmosphere of discord, and I yielded to an imperious, but loving woman, willing to make her happy in the only way possible to one of her peculiar temper. I do not mean to speak disparagingly of Josephine, for I owed her much that I gratefully remember, but she had those faults, and unfortunately they seem to have descended to one of her children."

"Did Louise venture to oppose you openly, this evening?"

"I should think she did. If you could only have heard the bold impertinence with which she expressed herself, you would have been both astonished and outraged. She declares that as long as *she* opposes our union, you will defer it; of course you cannot make our happiness dependent on the caprice of a willful child."

Miss Digby thoughtfully said:

"Yet I should be most unwilling to assume the po-

sition I must hold toward her as your wife while she is so bitterly set against our marriage. What did her message about packing up mean? You did not seriously think of removing her from this place."

"I have given her the alternative to submit to my wishes gracefully or to be sent to boarding-school. She chose the latter, and I shall take her away tomorrow afternoon."

"But her health is not strong yet, and it may suffer from confinement in a school. Had we not better bear with her, and defer our union till she is more reconciled to it?"

"With her temper, concession will never answer—she would think us both entirely at her mercy, and tyrannize accordingly. Her health is firm enough to bear the discipline I shall subject her to. I am well acquainted with Madame S——, the lady I intend to place her with, and I know she will act by Louise exactly as I wish. The summer vacation is at hand, and she takes such pupils as remain with her, to a country place she owns near Philadelphia, to spend it there. Louise will have plenty of fresh air and exercise. I intend that she shall also have studies given her to show her what a different thing is your mild rule from the discipline of her new preceptors. Madame S—— is very kind, but she is also very strict, and I think that a few weeks with her, will render Louise pliable enough to grant anything I may demand of her."

"Of course I cannot oppose your will with reference to your own daughter, and it is probably the best course to pursue toward her. With all her faults I think Louise is very affectionate, and I know she is

strongly attached to me, although she refuses to accept me as her stepmother. When she is separate from us and thrown among strangers, she must bitterly repent of her late willfulness, and make every atonement in her power for it."

"I believe that a single month of probation will suffice to bring her to reason, and I hope that you will not defer our union beyond that time. With, or without the consent of Louise, I claim my reward. I have never ceased to consider you the noblest woman in the world, Ada, and if I have crushed down the love I felt for you in my youth, and found a species of happiness in the precipitate marriage I made, it was far less perfect than that I hope to enjoy with you. I shall love you as dearly as in those long past days—nay—I do so now, and the heart that admitted no other passion, will come back to me as truly and tenderly as in those days of glamour, when we were all the world to each other."

His voice had taken a passionate intonation, and but for the silvery hair of her wooer, Miss Digby could have imagined that she was listening to the young and ardent lover who had won her heart in her early girlhood. The face was the same, with the nobility of added years and larger experience, giving it a meaning and expression it had lacked in those youthful days. The rosy-faced boy who had first spoken to her of love, was a very different person from this grave and dignified man who had borne the burdens of life with honor and success, and after many trials came to lay all he had won at her feet, and ask her to brighten the life which had always been imperfect without her.

Miss Digby was touched by his appeal, self-contained as she believed herself to be, she found her heart beat-

ing with unwonted rapidity, and she knew that a happy light was kindling in her eyes, far different from the serene expression they usually wore. But she would not turn them away from him; that would be too much like girlish coquetry, and she did not for a moment forget the staid and dignified age which she had attained. She suffered him to draw near her, and press her hand between both his own, as she said :

“ I think we fully understand each other, George, and feel that we are to each other what no one else can be to either of us. At first, I had many doubts as to the possibility of resuming our old relations with any prospect of the happiness of which we once dreamed—but I think differently now. We can glide down the stream of life together as supremely contented with our lot as if fate had not so long severed us. Your children shall be mine, and in time, even Louise shall acknowledge that you acted wisely in seeking in me a guide, and guardian to her. But let us not be precipitate—give her a little time to reconcile herself to what she must be made to understand is inevitable. I lately thought that without the consent of both the children, I would not assume the position you offer me; but the conduct of Louise has both wounded and offended me, and if she is still intractable, at the end of five weeks, I will give you my hand without consulting her. Does not that satisfy you ? ”

“ My dear Ada, you consider this refractory girl far more than she deserves, but I love you all the better for it. I concede your request for another week of delay. That will bring the first of August around; we will pass the first few days of our union in this sweet seclusion, and then go to Cape May and spend

the remainder of the season there. Alice is now old enough to see something of society, and it will be as well to initiate her at a fashionable watering-place as anywhere else. In settling up my business affairs, a handsome residence in Philadelphia was transferred to me for a heavy debt, and next winter we will establish ourselves in it, and collect around us such society as is suited to our tastes. How do you like my plans, Ada?"

"I approve them entirely. Alice can have the benefit of masters to complete her studies in music and French, and at the same time see as much of society as is desirable for so young a girl. If Louise does not petition to be taken into favor again, we shall be near enough to her to watch over her, and gradually bring her back to a sense of the duty she owes you. I think her a precocious and highly-gifted child. If properly trained, I believe she will make a true and noble woman, as well as a very brilliant one."

Mr. Balfour smiled faintly.

"I shall give her up entirely to you, Ada; for if any one can correct the faults of her temper, and not at the same time alienate her affections, it is you who will be the good fairy to bring about the transformation we desire. I regard both my darling girls with extreme tenderness, but Louise has always caused me uneasiness concerning both her physical and mental health: solicitude for her has given her a stronger hold on my affections than she deserves."

"You will not think so in the time to come. The crust of selfishness once penetrated, the finer qualities of Louise will blossom with beauty, and produce rare fruit. The morbid jealousy that deforms her character must be dealt with gently, yet firmly, and as she devel-

opes into womanhood, I hope to see it entirely eradicated.

"I trust so, but I scarcely dare to be sanguine on that score. The tendency that is in the blood is not easily got rid of, and Louise comes honestly by that unhappy trait. For her own happiness I trust that your efforts may be successful; in the meantime we can only pray, and hope for a radical change for the better."

"Do not despond of success, George; I do not, for I see in Louise so much of your buoyant and happy nature, that in the end I am sure the good will gain the ascendancy over the evil in her disposition. She is an interesting study to me, for she has more character than any child of her age I have ever known."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Ada, and I only hope that she will not exhaust your patience and forbearance when you undertake the task that lies before you."

"There is little to fear of that. I can be very patient if a good end is to be attained, and this one I have most deeply at heart."

"I know that, and I am most grateful. My wayward girl will fall into kind considerate hands, and I am sure that all that is possible will be done to make her both good and happy. This is the twenty-fifth of June, and on the first day of August I shall expect to claim my wife. To-day is Thursday, and on this day five weeks we will have a quiet wedding, with Alice and your friend for attendants."

"I can make such preparations as are necessary in that time, and it will be as well to have it over, that Louise may make up her mind to the actual position of affairs."

Mr. Balfour took her hand again, and lifted it to his lips, and said in a voice that thrilled with emotion:

“ Oh, Ada, if I expressed to you all that is in my heart at this moment, you, with your calm sense and equal temperament, would think me, what the world pronounces the worst of all fools—an old man deeply and passionately in love. You are as handsome—as winning to me as in those early days when we believed that no fate would ever sever us. In a moment of madness I believed that you had proved false to the vows we had exchanged, and I placed a barrier between us that was impassable. It was well for me, perhaps, that years intervened before I knew the truth. When it did come, I did not curse the man who had so bitterly wronged us, for I looked upon my wife, and the three lovely children she had given me, and I felt that God had been better to me than I deserved; but you, Ada, were alone. You had no near relations, I knew, and I left you bereft of the one tie in which you might have found happiness. That was my regret; but now I trust that I shall be able to atone to you for the error I committed, and make your last years as happy as I once dreamed our early ones would be.”

Miss Digby flushed, and a soft and beautiful light came into her eyes as she raised them to his, and replied :

“ As it regards the foolishness of loving at our age, I believe I am in the same category with yourself. We have retained youth of heart, if Time has dealt with us in other respects. There are on record several such marriages as ours will be that were eminently happy, and I believe we shall be able to add another to the list. I hear Claire speaking in the yard, and I believe I will go to Louise a little while. She may be in a more tractable mood by this time.”

“Tell me something of this beautiful friend of yours. She excites my interest and curiosity, for I do not remember ever hearing you speak of her.”

Miss Digby hesitated a moment as to revealing the identity of Claire with the repudiated wife of Walter Thorne, but feeling that after what her friend had said, she had no right to betray her incognita, she only said:

“Madame L’Epine is a native of Virginia. I became acquainted with her many years ago, and I have always taken a warm interest in her. We sustained an irregular correspondence during her long residence in France. She has no relations, and when she came back to her native land, she naturally came to one of the best friends she could claim in it. She is independent in fortune, and you have seen for yourself that she is an elegant and accomplished woman.”

“And a very high-strung one, I should say, too. She makes me think of a full-blooded Arabian, who would take the bit between his teeth, and go headlong, even on a course that would lead to destruction. I admire her, but she is a different type of woman from you, Ada.”

Miss Digby was struck with the intuitive perception of character his words indicated, but she only smiled, and said:

“Claire’s temperament is an impulsive and fiery one, but she has many noble and womanly traits nevertheless. She has known one overwhelming grief in her life, and it has borne bitter fruit; but I love her, and am happy to have her near me at this crisis in my life.”

“As your friend, of course, I accept her as mine. Alice seems deeply fascinated by her.”

“Yes, as all are who come within the sphere of her attractions. You will soon find out how charming she can be, and like her on her own account.”

Claire came in, followed by Alice, and Miss Digby left them to entertain Mr. Balfour, while she sought the room of Louise.

She found her lying on her bed, weeping violently, and the whole apartment strewn with the articles she had drawn from drawers and wardrobe, without attempting to pack them in the open traveling trunk that stood ready to receive them.

Miss Digby drew near her, and softly passing her hand over her disordered hair, said:

“Louise, my child, this will never do. You will make yourself ill again if you give way to your feelings in this manner.”

The girl started up, threw back her curls, and passionately cried:

“Who would care if I did make myself sick, even if I were to die? You all make yourselves happy together, singing, and enjoying yourselves as gayly as if there was not a sore and wounded heart within the sound of your voices; not caring in the least for the poor, miserable, deserted child who is first in nobody’s estimation. Oh! if I had only some one to love me best—*best* of all!”

Miss Digby sat down upon the side of the bed, and attempted to draw the excited creature in her arms; but Louise recoiled from her, and she sorrowfully said:

“My dear, you will not believe me; but I must assure you, nevertheless, that you have not been out of my mind this evening; and had I thought that my presence would have been welcome, I should have

sought you at an earlier hour. As it is, I could not sleep without coming to you to try and bring you into a better frame of mind."

Almost with a sneer, Louise replied :

"Oh ! I dare say you would have come to talk me over, and win my consent to the—the—the ridiculous proceeding you and papa are bent on. There ! it is ridiculous, and I don't care if I have said it ! But you need not waste your breath on me, for I am not going to say that I am willing to let you, or any one else, take my mamma's place. I have heard her talk about stepmothers, and say she could not rest in her grave, if she thought one would be placed over her children. Papa knows what a horror she always had of them, yet he is ready to—to——"

She broke down completely, and again buried her head in her pillow, weeping convulsively.

After waiting a few moments, Miss Digby quietly asked :

"Do you think, in becoming your stepmother, that I shall change my nature, Louise ? You have now been with me two years, and I ask you if, in that time, I have been either unjust or harsh in my rule ? Why should it be more difficult for you to submit to what I may require of you, after I become your father's wife, than it has hitherto been ?"

"Oh ! that was different. You had no real power then, and you were trying to win Alice and me to like you, with a view to what has now happened. You knew papa had been in love with you, in his verdant days, and you thought he had still enough of the old preference in his heart to come back to you, as soon as decency permitted. My mamma is buried out of sight,

and forgotten ; and that old gray-haired man wants to make himself happier with you than he ever was with her.

Miss Digby was deeply wounded and offended by these reckless words. She began to fear that Louise would prove utterly unmanageable ; and she was at a loss to know how to deal with her in her present excited state. She walked the floor several moments before she was calm enough to reply to her last speech. At length she paused beside the bed, and looking compassionately on the flushed face that boldly confronted her, said :

“ If the memory of your deceased mother is more sacred to you than the happiness of your living father, I can only regret it for your own sake. As to the motives you have meanly imputed to me ; yes, *meanly* imputed, Louise, for treating you with affectionate kindness, I have nothing to say. I shall not condescend to vindicate myself from that of which I know myself to be utterly incapable. True, your father loved me in his youth, but the whole tenor of his married life proves that he gave your mother an honest and tender love—that he cherished her in the best sense of the word, and mourned her loss deeply. Who should know this better than you, for you have often told me of those months of darkness and gloom that followed her decease ? ”

“ He was not grieving for her *alone*. His beautiful Ella, his winning Ada—for she had *your* name—and his only son, with little Cora, all lie beside my mother. If he had wept for mamma only, he could not so soon have consoled himself. You accuse me of meanness ; and I may have misjudged you ; but what motive could

you have had for treating us with such tenderness, if you did not look to the very reward you have won?"

"You feel, then, that I have been tender with you; but you are mistaken as to the motive. Until very lately, I did not believe that anything could induce me to renew my old engagement with your father. He approached me first through his children; and the affection I have conceived for Alice and yourself, induced me to listen to him. I am alone in the world, and I felt that, to give you up, would be a severe blow to me: you have become necessary to me, as I believe I am to you. I could not remain near you when you were reclaimed by your father, except as his wife. But I hesitated long before I consented to assume that position. I feared that the long-buried love could never brighten into life again; but now I know better: pride and principle taught me to repress it, but it was never dead, because it was founded on respect for the noble man who has been true to every duty in life that devolved on him."

"Then you have promised to marry him, though you gave us to understand that, without the consent of both Alice and myself, you would not do so?"

Louise half raised herself as she asked this question, and breathlessly awaited the reply.

Miss Digby coldly said:

"If your objections had been reasonable, or had they been stated with more respect for your father and myself, they might have been considered, and pains taken to obviate them; but you have shown such overbearing temper and lack of consideration for others in all you have said, that I have decided to pay no attention to your opposition. I give you five weeks to reconcile

yourself to what is inevitable. If, in that time, you come back to me as my good and loving child, I will receive you with warmest affection, and never remind you of all you have lately done and said to wound and estrange me. But, if you still persist in the perverse course you have adopted, it will only be at your own cost. I cannot be so unjust to your father as to hold him in suspense, at the caprice of a thoughtless and selfish child. We shall be married on the first day of August, whether your consent is given or not."

Louise uttered a shrill cry, and again buried her head in the pillows. Miss Digby moved toward the door, but, as she was about to pass through it, the blurred and angry face of the young rebel again became visible, and she said :

"You have broken faith with me, and I have no more respect for you. You pretend to marry my father that you may promote the happiness of his children. You know that the very thought of his union with you is odious to me—that it makes me wretched—yet you persist in carrying out your intentions. If that is not double-dealing, I don't know what is. I won't stay to see it done. You may send me among strangers to break my heart, as you mean to do ; I don't care, for it does not matter much what becomes of me now."

Without the slightest evidence of irritation, Miss Digby replied :

"Very well, Louise. Since such is your decision, you can go to-morrow afternoon. Severe as I am sure the trial will prove, it will be better for you to pass through it. You will soon learn to value what you have thrown away, and be most anxious to resume your true place in the hearts that love you, in spite of

all your waywardness. When you are ready to come back, in a proper frame of mind to appreciate your home and friends at their just value, you will be tenderly welcomed ; but no more concessions will be made to you. From yourself the first advances toward reconciliation must come, for I have done all that I shall attempt to induce you to play the part of a dutiful and affectionate daughter to the kindest and most considerate of fathers. I will leave you now to think over your late conduct, and, I hope, to repent of it. Even at the eleventh hour it will not be too late to ask and receive forgiveness for the rude and ungenerous language you have dared to use both to Mr. Balfour and myself."

As she passed from the room, Louise defiantly said :

"I have nothing to repent of : I will be sent a thousand miles away before I will stay here to witness a marriage that I would do anything to prevent."

Miss Digby did not pause to listen to these words. Indignant, wounded, and almost hopeless of subduing this belligerent spirit through loving influences, she retired to her own room a short time to compose herself and to pray earnestly for guidance in her conduct toward the child to whom she was about to assume the responsible position of a mother.

In half an hour she rejoined the party in the library, looking as serene as usual. In reply to an earnest look of inquiry from Mr. Balfour, she said in a low tone :

"Louise will be ready to accompany you to Philadelphia to-morrow afternoon. In the morning Alice and myself will assist her to get ready for the journey."

He sighed over her intractability, but he did not waver a moment in the course he had decided on.

Severe as he knew the ordeal would be to her, he believed that Louise needed it to bring her to a just appreciation of the affection lavished upon her. He loved her very tenderly, but he felt that in his own firmness lay the only hope of conquering the rebellious and ungrateful spirit she had lately manifested.

On the following morning Louise appeared at breakfast with swollen eyes, which might have elicited sympathy if her face had not worn so sullen and forbidding an expression. She scarcely spoke in reply to any one, and seemed to feel as if she were injured and deserted by both father and sister. To Miss Digby her manner was repellant and haughty, but that lady calmly ignored her stately airs and treated her precisely as she always had done, with gentle and kind consideration.

After breakfast Mr. Balfour took Louise out to the beach for a walk, and he talked seriously with her in the vain hope that she would yet recede from the stubborn position she had taken, and yield gracefully to what she could not prevent. But Louise was obstinate to the last, and insisted she would become a martyr to his desire to make himself a happy home again in spite of her opposition.

Louise was scarcely less disrespectful to him on this morning than she had been on the previous evening; she seemed to consider herself absolved from all duty or consideration, by the fact that he chose to marry without her consent. As they returned to the house Mr. Balfour said :

“If you persist in this course you will alienate me from you entirely, Louise. Love cannot subsist, even between the nearest relations, without some food.

You will force me to bestow on your sister a double portion of affection, while you defraud yourself of what is legitimately your due. My poor child, you do not know how unhappy you make me, or you could not act thus."

"I do not expect you to have eyes, ears nor heart for any one but Ada Digby from this time forward. Alice may be willing to stay with you and pick up such stray crumbs of love as you may throw to her, but I will not. I cannot defraud myself of what I never had, for if you cared for me much, you could never have thought of giving me a stepmother. You know how mamma always talked of them, and sweet and affectionate as Miss Digby has been to Alice and me, when once she gets the power in her hands she will not be any better than the rest of them."

"You are incorrigible, and it is useless to attempt to reason with you. The prejudice against stepmothers is universal, yet thousands of good women have stood in that relation to children and been as true to their duties as if they had been their own—as tender of the little ones as their mothers could have been. You libel your own sex when you speak as if no woman can be trusted with authority over the children of another."

"*Vox populi, vox Dei*," she maliciously quoted. "If that is true, the opinion of the world is worth some consideration. I only repeat what I have been taught; what I learned from the lips of one I loved best of all—of one who loved me too well ever to have placed a spurious father over me if *she* had been left a widow."

"Louise, this passes endurance. You care for nothing on earth but having your own way; thwarted in it, you betray the most repulsive traits of your nature,

and I find you hard, selfish, and even *coarse*. I shall speak with you no more on this subject, but I shall exact from you implicit obedience to my commands and ample submission hereafter for your present contumacy."

By this time they had gained the door, and Louise darted into the house and sought her own room to weep the injured tears she had held back with so much difficulty while in her father's presence. She was very wretched, for in her heart was an oppressive sense of wrong-doing, yet her fanatical allegiance to the memory of her dead mother made her believe that her course was justifiable, though it brought herself censure and banishment from the paternal roof. She presently wiped away her tears and set herself energetically to work to pack up her clothes and get ready for her departure.

When Miss Digby, accompanied by Alice, came in to assist her, they found that Louise had accomplished all unaided, and she seemed so ungracious toward them that they both left her after a few attempts to bring her into a better mood.

The day wore on—the carriage that had been ordered to take Mr. Balfour and his daughter to the railroad station a few miles distant, came to the door, and the luggage was strapped on. Up to the last moment Miss Digby hoped for some evidence of relenting on the part of Louise, but she gave no sign, and after bowing formally to the two elder ladies, she kissed Alice lightly and sprang into the vehicle as if glad to effect her escape from them all.

On the journey she maintained an impenetrable reserve toward her father, for she had decided in her

own mind that she was of no consequence to him in the new scheme of life he had planned, and while others were paramount to her she would never consent to assume the place in his house that of right belonged to her. Mr. Balfour permitted her to take Fidèle with her, though doubtful as to his reception in the boarding-school to which they were bound. But Louise seemed to cling so fondly to the dog that he had not the heart to refuse her this consolation, badly as she was behaving.

They reached Philadelphia that night, but too late to go to the residence of Madame S——. It was passed at a hotel, and on the following morning Mr. Balfour took his daughter to her new abode. In her heart Louise shrank from the ordeal before her, and trembled at the prospect of being left alone among strange people; but she would have died sooner than betray her feelings. She had chosen her course, and she intended to abide by it, cost what it would to herself.

The house, a square brick edifice, stood in a large sombre-looking yard, surrounded by a high wall. A ring at the gate brought a servant who unlocked it and admitted them into the sacred shades consecrated to feminine knowledge. In a few more moments they were in the presence of a small, dark, and very fat Frenchwoman, who spoke English correctly and volubly.

Her manner was gracious to Mr. Balfour, and almost caressing to his daughter, but in the mood in which Louise then was she felt as if she almost hated her for the cordial affability with which she welcomed her among her pupils.

"She's the same to all of us at first, I suppose," thought the young cynic; "but wait till she gets us under her thumb, and she'll make us feel her nails if we do the least thing that is against the rules. I shall pine away in this sombre old place, and I hope I shall die; then they will all be sorry that they have broken my heart."

While these thoughts passed through her mind, her father was talking earnestly with Madame S—— in the recess of a window. She nodded intelligently many times, and finally said:

"I fully understand, Mr. Balfour. I shall do all that is possible to restore Miss Louise to a proper sense of her duty. You may rely on my judgment to hit the right medium between indulgence and undue severity. I do not forget that you befriended me once when I needed assistance, and I will do my best to show my gratitude, even at this late day."

"Do not speak of that, Madame; it was simply a matter of business, and I did no more for you than any other liberal man would have done."

"But the *way* in which you did it, Monsieur, merits every encomium. Your countrymen do not often know how to confer a favor gracefully, but you proved that you possessed the heart of a Howard and the chivalry of a Bayard."

Mr. Balfour laughed at this exaggeration, for all he had done for the speaker was to advance her a sum of money to assist her to establish her school, for which he had not rigorously exacted payment.

Madame S—— had once lived in New Orleans, and been well known to Mr. Balfour as an accomplished and deserving woman, whose husband was entirely

unworthy of her. His family resided in Philadelphia and after the decease of the dissipated son and brother, they offered the widow facilities for commencing a school in that city provided she could raise a certain sum of money. Mr. Balfour had befriended her then, and she was now glad of an opportunity to prove to him that she appreciated his kindness.

Louise took leave of her father with the same stoical appearance of indifference, and he left her, feeling much depressed and discouraged, on her account. When he was gone she wept herself almost sick, but as long as her father remained in sight she repressed her tears with a heroism worthy of a better cause.

As an especial favor to her benefactor, Fidèle was allowed to remain with Louise, for which concession she felt some gratitude to her new preceptress.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN APPROACHING CLIMAX.

MR. BALFOUR did not return to Seaview—he had business to attend to in New York, which would detain him several weeks, but he wrote word to Miss Digby that he should be back in time to claim the fulfillment of her promise on the day appointed for their union.

The interval was filled up with preparations for the approaching event, for the visit to Cape May required a handsome outfit for both herself and Alice, and the bride elect was most anxious that her young charge

should have an elegant and tastefully selected wardrobe. The three ladies made several trips to Philadelphia on this important business, but they were not undertaken until Louise had gone into the country to spend the vacation on the farm belonging to Madame S——.

For the first two weeks of her banishment, Louise had not deigned to write a line in reply to the affectionate letters sent to her from the cottage with as much regularity as if they had been answered in the most diffusive manner. Alice wrote every other day, giving her sister a minute account of everything that she thought would interest her, and Miss Digby always added a postscript so worded as to afford the obstinate girl every facility for returning to her home without any undue humiliation on her part.

At length a brief acknowledgement of these letters was vouchsafed, which ran thus:

“I am doing well enough here, though I do not pretend to say I am happy. That would be impossible to an outcast like me. Nobody loves me as well as I love them; not even you, Alice, with all your professions. Since we came to the country I have fallen into the routine prescribed for me by papa, though the three other girls who are here with me are only required to practice their music regularly.

“I have long lessons assigned me, which I recite to Madame alone. We speak French altogether, but that is no difficulty to me, you know. But I am tired of it all, and wish that——

“No—I will not say that—I will maintain the position I have taken if it kills me. I suppose you are getting ready for that odious marriage, but I won’t come back

to see orange flowers placed on gray hair—it is too absurd, and makes me too miserable even to think of it. Good-bye, Alice ; I don't ask you to think of me, for of course you are too much taken up with your fine preparations to waste your time in that way.

“LOUISE.”

When Miss Digby read this, she smiled hopefully, and said :

“ We shall have Louise back in time for the wedding, my dear. She is evidently getting heartily sick of being away from us ; she is slowly coming to the conviction that happiness is only to be found in the performance of duty.”

“ I hope so,” was the dubious reply of Alice, for she could see very little that was encouraging in her sister's letter. She replied to it immediately, and the ice once broken, Louise wrote more regularly herself. As the correspondence progressed, it was evident that Louise was wretchedly discontented, though she made no complaint of the treatment she received. Madame S—— was very kind to her, she said, but very rigorous in exacting the performance of the tasks set for her.

“ I am heart-sick and weary of it all,” she at last wrote, “ but I will bear anything sooner than yield my consent to papa's marriage with *any one*. I do not object particularly to Miss Digby, for she is as good a choice as he could make at his time of life ; but I loathe the thought of seeing even her in poor mamma's place. I don't know how you can bear it with so much equanimity, Alice. But, then, mamma did not pet you as she did me, and perhaps that is the reason.”

“ No,” thought Alice, with a little sigh, as she re-

called the past, and remembered the yearning of her childish heart to claim the same measure of affection from her mother which was freely given to her favorites.

“Papa tried to make it up to me, though, and now I am ready to promote his happiness in the way most pleasing to him. Although Louise has done so much to annoy her, Aunt Ada will make no difference between us. She is too just for that. It is strange to me that Louise cannot see what good fortune it is to two motherless girls to have a friend and guardian in such a woman as she is.”

Time rolled on. July was far advanced, and the bridal trousseau, with the elegant summer wardrobe of Alice, had been sent home. Among the latter were several beautiful dresses for Louise, for Miss Digby still cherished the hope that the rebellion would end before the wedding actually took place. An invitation was sent to Madame S—— to be present, and she was requested to bring her pupil with her if she would consent to return to her late home.

Mr. Balfour arrived at Seaview on the Monday before the wedding, looking happy, and handsome. He had settled his business to his satisfaction, and announced that he was henceforth free from mercantile trammels, and at liberty to follow the bent of his own inclinations. He found himself the possessor of an ample fortune, profitably invested, and his spirits arose to almost boyish glee as he thought over the bright prospects before him. He had been faithful in using the talents entrusted to him, and he had won his reward fairly and honorably. He had nothing to reproach himself with in the past, and he raised a grateful heart to Heaven for bestowing such perfect content on him even in the autumn of his days,

When Mr. Balfour read over the letters of Louise, he took the same view Miss Digby did, and cheerfully said :

“ We shall have our little rebel back before Thursday, penitent enough, I dare say, though she will not say much on the subject. Neither will we, for we can afford to be generous when we are all so happy.”

In the evening, when they were walking on the beach and Claire and Alice had gone some distance ahead of them, Mr. Balfour suddenly said :

“ I have been very forgetful, Ada, not to tell you before that I met with the son of our old enemy while I was in Washington last week. He was a boy when I went away from L——, but when I heard his name, I claimed his acquaintance, and invited him to come to Seaview in time for the wedding. As he is almost the only relative you have, I thought the courtesy was due to him.”

“ Good Heavens ! ” exclaimed Miss Digby, stopping suddenly and looking around, “ I hope that Walter did not accept your invitation ! But of course he did not, for he has not spoken to me for several years.”

“ Don’t feel too secure on that point, for he seemed perfectly willing to let bygones go for what they are worth. He promised me that he would be here on Thursday, and I hope that you are not displeased at the prospect of seeing him. If so, I shall regret my precipitate invitation.”

“ I have no unwillingness to meet Walter Thorne myself, though he has not treated me as courteously as he should ; but—but his coming here will be very awkward just now.”

“ Why so ? You are not afraid that he will think of

falling in love with Alice? She is young enough to be his daughter, and he will be likely to find metal more attractive in your beautiful friend."

"It is of that which I am afraid," she absently replied. "If I believed that any good could come from—from—"

She paused so long, that Mr. Balfour asked:

"From what, Ada? What are you dreaming of? Thorne is a dashing, and elegant man, and I think it by no means unlikely that he and Madame L'Epine may take a fancy to each other. You think, possibly, that there is too much fire in both to render it safe for them to think of sailing in the same boat. However, as she has been so many years a widow, she will scarcely consent to marry any one now."

Miss Digby had thought rapidly while he was speaking. She saw no alternative but to place him in possession of the whole truth, and she gravely said:

"Chance, fate, or whatever you may term it, is against me. I must confide Claire's secret to you, but I know that you will not betray it. Promise me, however; for she would never forgive me if I were instrumental in thwarting her plans."

"You are very mysterious, and I am becoming very curious. Of course I shall feel bound to respect any confidence you may impart to me; but I cannot imagine in what manner your friend's plans can have anything to do with Mr. Thorne."

"I can soon enlighten you, though I am afraid that Claire would hardly forgive me if she knew that I had done so. Do you remember the story of Walter's unfortunate first marriage?"

"Yes, very distinctly; for you wrote the account to

me yourself, and I remember how indignant you were at the treatment the poor girl met at his hands, and those of his father. But what has that to do with Madame L'Epine?"

"Everything—for Claire is the repudiated wife, and she has come back to this country solely with the view of bringing Walter to her feet again."

Mr. Balfour looked astonished, and then pleased. He said:

"She must have loved him very devoutly to forgive the past, and come across the ocean to seek him again. He would be a worse man than I take him to be if he does not respond to her wishes, and renew their old relations without delay."

Miss Digby shook her head, and gravely replied:

"You are far from understanding the situation. It is not love so much as pride, and hate, that has brought Claire hither on such an errand. She vowed years ago that she would yet be received with honor in the home from which she was spurned—that she would win more than the old love from its master, but it was not in the hope that any real union can ever exist between them. She will give Walter her hand, but—I am afraid she thinks only of becoming a Nemesis to him—not a minister of happiness."

"She thinks so now, but when once she has regained her rightful position, she will forget all those fantastic notions and seek to make her home a pleasant one to live in. Your friend is too sensible a woman to act otherwise I am sure."

"I wish I could take the same view, but I am afraid that resentment is too deeply seated in Claire's mind to permit her to act quite reasonably. Since she

developed her purpose to me, I have used all my influence to induce her to visit her friends in Virginia, and then return to Europe without seeking the man she persists in regarding as her husband. I relied on the difficulty of effecting a meeting between them as the best safeguard, and here he is rushing on his fate by coming to our wedding."

"Well, well; let things take their course. There will be a recognition—a reconciliation—and so fascinating a fellow as your cousin can scarcely fail to make his peace with the woman who has clung to the idea of reclaiming him through so long a period of time."

"But such is not the wish of Claire. She is so much changed in every respect from the unformed child Walter won in his youth, that it will be impossible for him to identify her, and she insists on maintaining the strictest incognita towards him. If she gives him her hand, it will be without a suspicion on his part that he is taking to his heart the wife he once cast off. In her own time, and her own way, she will reveal herself to him after they are united. I have exhausted my eloquence in trying to turn her from this purpose, but I have found her immovable."

After reflecting a few moments, Mr. Balfour said:

"It will end all right, Ada. Madame L'Epine loves the man who injured her in spite of all he has done to alienate her affections. She may not be aware of the fact, but it will make itself apparent to her when she has regained what was torn from her so ruthlessly by that old man; for he it was, after all, who ruined his son's life, as he so long darkened ours. If she succeeds in winning her husband back, she will soon find out that to make him wretched is no way to im-

prove her own happiness. We must hope for the best, and trust to her good sense and good feeling to bring about a happier result than you anticipate."

"Then you think it will be well for him to come here?"

"I am glad that I happened to invite him; it seems as if an overruling Providence had taken affairs into its own hands. I shall keep your friend's secret, and try by every means in my power to bring her plans to a successful issue. We have no right to attempt to keep those two apart, for fate evidently wills that they shall be reunited."

"You may be right, but I am afraid that you do not understand Claire as well as I do. She is very resentful, and this desire to regain a position in which she will find little happiness seems to have become a mania with her. I cannot foresee how it will end, and I dread the thought of favoring her wishes, only to plunge both her and Walter into an abyss of wretchedness from which there would be no escape."

"My dear Ada, God is over all, and he can bring good out of apparent evil. If Madame L'Epine came hither to seek Mr. Thorne, she will find him at all hazards, and it will be far better for the meeting to take place where friends are near to watch over her. She is a woman who will not submit to be thwarted, and she is one whom few men could resist if she chose to exercise her fascinations upon them. She may lead Thorne a fearful dance at first, but I think the end will be peace and union between them."

"I hope you may be right; God alone can change those two bitter hearts, and bring back a shadow of the happiness they once enjoyed with each other."

Claire admits that for one little month she would not have exchanged her lot with that of any other mortal creature ; but I am afraid that what subsequently happened has embittered her beyond forgiveness."

"Not a bit of it, Ada ; your friend is a woman to love but once in her life ; and underlying all her bitter resentfulness, is a strong and deathless affection for the man against whom she meditates some fearful retribution. That purpose will sink out of sight and be forgotten in the new love that will spring up between them. If Madame L'Epine did not intuitively feel some such conviction, she would shrink from again linking her fate with that of Walter Thorne, with a thrilling sense of disgust and horror. No woman could deliberately throw herself into the power of a man for whom she feels no emotion of preference."

"In that I believe you are right ; but Claire is not to be judged by ordinary rules. However, there is nothing left for us but to let things take their course. I will do nothing to retard or advance her schemes, if she persists in carrying them out—the responsibility must lie entirely upon herself. As to Walter, he merits some retribution for his treatment of both the women who trusted their destiny to his keeping. I am willing to receive him here that I may induce him to carry out the last wishes of poor Agnes, and permit her daughter to come to me. She is shut up alone at Thornhill and treated with a degree of harshness that is shameful. May and Alice are nearly of the same age, and they would be suitable companions for each other."

"If I had known anything about Miss Thorne I should have extended my invitation to her, also ; but you can write yourself and ask her father to bring her with him."

“It is too late for that now, for May is near L——, and by the time my letter would reach him, Walter would be ready to set out on his journey hither. I must prepare Claire for his advent, though I shrink from the thought of his coming to find her beneath our roof.”

“At that moment they were rejoined by the others, and the conversation became animated and general. Mr. Balfour regarded Claire with deepening interest after the revelation he had just heard. He watched her brilliant face, so full of animation when she was interested, so varying in expression that the passionate power of the nature within seemed stamped on every individual feature; and he comprehended that what this woman willed, she would accomplish, let the result to herself be what it might.

That night, after they had retired to their separate apartments, Miss Digby sought Claire. She found her sitting beside a window that looked toward the sea, apparently wrapped in sombre thought. When her friend came in, she turned her head, and smiling faintly, said:

“I knew you had something to say to me, Ada, from the way you looked at me several times this evening. I feel a presentiment that some crisis in my fate is approaching, but in what way I cannot tell.”

“You must be very sympathetic, as the magnetizers say. Cannot your intuition divine what I have come hither to say!”

“No; beyond the restless consciousness of some impending danger, the oracle is dumb. What is it, Ada? Why do you look so grave?”

“Because I am afraid of results; but who can con-

trol fate? It seems to me that your strong will has acted on some occult and mysterious force to bring about exactly what you have so much at heart."

Claire started forward, alternately paling and flushing, as she eagerly exclaimed:

"Is he coming here? Have you heard from Walter, for your words can point only to him?"

"I have heard indirectly from him. Mr. Balfour accidentally met with him in Washington, a few days ago, and invited him to Seaview. He will be here by Thursday."

It was difficult to tell how this announcement affected Claire. She bent her face down and covered it with her hands, but her companion could see that her form was shivering with repressed emotion. When she looked up she was deadly pale, but she calmly said:

"I knew a way would be opened to a meeting between us, and Mr. Balfour has unconsciously acted as the agent of Fate. I have much to thank him for—much, much."

"I am not so sure of that, Claire. I dread Walter's coming more than I can express: I am afraid for you, my dear, for I am impressed with the belief that you will attempt to avenge the past on him, even if you sacrifice all that should be dear to you in the present."

"Oh, Ada, dear, we have exhausted that subject, and you must excuse me if I decline to renew it again. I shall fulfill my destiny—let that suffice. I am ready for the conquest that awaits me, but I must be quite sure of my incognita. I know that outwardly I am so changed that he can never suspect my identity; but is my voice so different that his ear will not recognize some of its old familiar tones? That is the only fear I have."

“Your voice, like your person, has developed; and even in speaking it has a depth and meaning unknown to it in your girlish days. I believe that Walter will not recall anything familiar in it; so set your doubts at rest. Your name, however, is a very uncommon one in this country, and that may afford him a clue.”

“You must not call me by it. Translate it into Clara; or, better still, let me be Madame L’Epine, a friend whose acquaintance you accidentally made. He must not know how long I have resided in France—that of itself would set him to thinking and probably lead to my detection.”

“And if it did, would it not be the best thing that could happen? To lure Walter blindfold into a second union with you may have very sad results.”

“I dare say it will,” Claire coldly replied. “I do not intend the result to be a triumph to him—I thought you fully understood that.”

“I do; and deprecate it as the worst wrong you can do to yourself. I am not pleading for him, but for all that should be dear to you. Dear Claire, come out in your true character, or give up all thought of renewing your relations with Walter. He will resent a deception, and he is a difficult man to reconcile when he is once deeply offended.”

With a mocking laugh, Claire said:

“Do you suppose that I shall leave my slave the power to resent anything that I may do? No, indeed; I intend to make him adore me to that degree that he will sue abjectly—yes, *abjectly*, for any crumb of love I may choose to throw him. He has tortured another woman—he has tortured me, through the power our love for him gave him, and I intend to return the cup

to his own lips embittered a thousand fold. He shall drink it to its dregs ; and no one knows better than yourself how well he merits the punishment I have decreed him."

"I am aware of all that. But God has said : 'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay ;' and those who take it on themselves to deal out retributive justice usually find themselves in little better plight than the object of their punishment."

"I know all that, my dear friend, but the brand you would pluck from the burning is too far gone to go off in anything but fiery sparks, and such coals of fire as one heaps on one's enemy's head sometimes. My application of the words of the Good Book is rather literal, but it answers my purpose well enough."

"Heaping coals of fire on the head of another is something very different from what you propose, I am afraid. If I thought you meant to return only good for the evil you have endured, I should be more hopeful of the future."

"I can't tell you what I mean to do, for I scarcely yet know myself ; but one thing is clear to me, and that is, that Walter Thorne is coming hither, and I intend to make him my captive. I shall play with him as the cat tortures the mouse she intends to devour ; and when I find his patience and forbearance nearly exhausted, I will graciously condescend to accept the hand he pledged to me so long ago. For a few brief weeks he shall think himself a crowned demi-god, and then—then—That is enough for you to know, Ada. Stories always end with a happy marriage, and nobody thinks of lifting the curtain from the after life of the wedded lovers to pry into their domestic affairs, and

find out if the fair promise of perfect bliss did not prove all a delusion. It is refreshing to dream of ideally happy people, even if we don't find them in this work-a-day world of ours."

Miss Digby sighed. She knew that in her present mood Claire was impracticable. After a pause, she said :

"You must make your own fate, Claire: yet I believe you to be worthy of a better one than you are preparing for yourself. I shall not ask for any further confidence, for I rather shrink from the developments you might make. If I fully comprehend your plans, I might find it impossible to refrain from betraying you to Walter, as the surest means of saving you both from plunging into irremediable wretchedness."

"If you did that, Ada, I could never forgive you!" exclaimed Claire, in much excitement. "I have cherished this dream for years, and the one who snatches from me its fruition in the moment my triumph approaches would be no true friend. You have pledged your word to me, Ada, and I hold you bound to your promise of secrecy. From myself alone shall Walter Thorne learn who I am, and why I sought him a second time."

"So be it, then; but I hold myself absolved from the consequences. Good-night, Claire. I can only pray to a higher power to soften your resentful nature, and bring good out of the evil you seem bent on pursuing."

"Good-night," said Claire, faintly; and when the door closed on her friend, she bent down and wept bitterly.

All sense of triumph in the easy accomplishment of

the coveted meeting between herself and Thorne seemed to have died out, for the time at least.

She could scarcely realize that he was actually coming to Seaview ; that in a few more days she would stand face to face with the man whose perfidy had blighted her life ; to whom she had sworn to bring home the anguish he had caused her to suffer. Claire possessed great power of self-control, but she dreaded that it might fail her in the moment of meeting, for she knew that she would be moved to the depths of her soul, whether by love or hate she could not positively determine in these moments of tumultuous thought.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOUISE REPENTANT.

ON the following morning Claire appeared at breakfast, looking paler than usual, but she was not less animated and agreeable in conversation ; and Miss Digby thought that she detected a more gentle light in her brilliant eyes, a softer tone in her voice, proving that the deeper chords in her nature had been struck, and she argued favorably from these signs. She felt less dread as to the result of the approaching meeting, for she began to take the same view of the situation that Mr. Balfour did.

After the morning meal was over, when they were standing together on the portico, Alice, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, came up the pathway

leading to the portico on which her father and Miss Digby stood. She spoke as soon as she came near enough to be heard :

“ Here is something important from Lou, papa. She has written me only a line or two, but they tell the whole story. Here is what she says :

Alice displayed a sheet of note-paper on which was these words :

“ I am so unhappy that I can hold out no longer ; and, if papa will forgive me, I shall come back with Madame S—— and try to be a good daughter.

“ LOUISE.”

“ This is more than I hoped for,” said Miss Digby, with a smile radiant with tender joy. Mr. Balfour hastily broke the seal of the dainty envelope Alice thrust into his hands, and read the lines traced on the sheets of note-paper within.

RETREAT, July 29th, 18—

“ MY DEAREST PAPA—Can you forgive your naughty and selfish little girl for maintaining this long silence toward you ? I have wanted to write to you every day, but my heart rose up in rebellious bitterness against you whenever I thought of you in the character of a suitor to any one. I did not reflect that it is not my place to sit in judgment upon you ; and I have done it so ruthlessly, so undutifully, that now I have repented of it, I hardly know how I can atone to you for the harsh thoughts I have harbored toward the two best friends I have in the world.

“ I do not wish you to think that putting me away

from you, and giving strangers authority over me, has made me submissive: *that* only made me harder and more defiant than before; and only yesterday I felt as if nothing on earth should ever induce me to forgive you for putting another wife in poor mamma's place.

"I am going to tell you what happened last night, and you will see why I write you this letter, and understand the cause of the change in my feelings.

"I had been out walking with Madame S—— till quite dark, and I felt weary and depressed when I went to my room. The young girl who occupied it with me has been sent for by some of her friends, and I have it to myself. I did not say my prayers before I got into bed, for I felt that God had little care for such a poor, forlorn little outcast as I had made myself: yet I would not see that I was most to blame for being here with no one to love or caress me as in those pleasant days when, I acknowledge, I was happy at Seaview.

"I fell asleep almost as soon as my head touched the pillow; and then a vision came to me which I shall always remember. Soft music seemed to float through my chamber, and a radiant glow of light was gradually diffused around the bed on which I lay; floating in this was a form which I knew at once to be that of my mother, but so spiritualized, so beautified, that only the heart of one who had loved her as I did could have recognized her.

"But heavenly as she looked, there was a cloud of sorrow on her face; and, as she bent over me, a tear fell upon my brow. I raised my arms, and cried out:

" "Oh, mamma, mamma! do angels weep over the unhappiness of those they have left on earth? Have

you come to console me for being left alone, with no one to care for me ? ”

“ A soft murmur seemed to issue from her lips, which formed itself into words.

“ ‘ I have come to show you your duty, Louise. Since kind earthly friends have set it before you in vain, I have obtained permission to visit you while you slumber, and show you how badly you have acted—how much unhappiness you are giving to those who deserve something better at your hands.’

“ I again cried out :

“ ‘ It is for *you* I opposed them. Look into my heart, and see that I thought only of you, while I believed papa had forgotten you.’

“ ‘ I know all that. I can read your thoughts, my child, and I have come to point out to you the right course to ensure your own happiness. Return to your home—witness what is to take place there, for I have no jealousy on my own account : I have passed beyond that phase of earthly feeling. But I have deep concern for my children, and with her who will be your earthly mother you will be contented and beloved. Go back to her and heal the wounds your ingratitude has inflicted. Only by doing so can you win forgiveness in Heaven and a blessing on the life that lies before you.’

“ I sobbed :

“ ‘ I will obey you, mamma. I will try to do right, if you will kiss me once more.’

“ She seemed to float down nearer and nearer, and I hoped she was about to gather me to her heart, and bear me away to the spirit land ; but she only touched my lips with hers, and then faintly whispered : ‘ Pray for strength, my darling,’ and the phantasy dissolved,

and I lay wide awake, staring through the darkness, but with my lips thrilling still with the kiss that had been impressed upon them.

“I was not frightened, though for a little while I firmly believed that mamma had been actually near me. I now know that she came to me only in a dream, but it was one that was too vivid to be passed over as others are. I got up, knelt down by the bed, and prayed earnestly to be helped to do right. I did not go to sleep for a long time afterwards. I lay awake, reviewing all my wayward conduct, and repenting of it. A new feeling came into my heart, which made me humbly ask :

“‘What right have I to claim to be *first* with those I love—I, who have done so little to merit affection?’

“I remembered the wrangling of the Disciples as to who should be first in heaven, and I took to myself the rebuke of the Divine Master. For the first time I felt how deeply I have sinned against His precepts—how unworthy I am of His care, and of the affection shown for me by those to whom he has delegated the charge of my life.

“I no longer feel aggrieved that I am not of paramount importance to you, though I begin dimly to comprehend that my own self-assertion was the true source of my anger on mamma’s account. I knew she was happy in heaven, yet I insisted that you should make yourself a martyr of constancy to her memory.

“Forgive me, papa, and love me as in other days—I know that Aunt Ada will, for she has held open a door of reconciliation from the first which I might have entered long ago if I had not been the most perverse of mortals.

"I am coming to Seaview with Madame S——, and I cannot tell you how delighted she was with the change in my feelings. She has been kind to me, but very exacting, as you required; but you must not think it was the hard tasks that brought me to submission. I should have gone on learning them with a bitter aching in my heart, if mamma had not come to me and pointed out a better way.

"Your repentant and affectionate LOUISE."

Tears were standing in Mr. Balfour's eyes when he stopped reading, and he silently offered the letter to Miss Digby. At a sign from her, Alice approached and looked over her shoulder, and together they read the lines Louise had written.

There was silence among them for a few moments, and then Alice said, with a slight tremor in her voice that she ineffectually tried to put down:

"Lou. was always famous for her dreams, you know, papa, but this is the most significant one she has ever had. I am most happy that something has brought her to a sense of her duty to you and to Aunt Ada."

The father kissed her, and huskily said:

"I am going to the dear child myself to assure her how lovingly she is forgiven—how gladly we will welcome her to our hearts again. I shall be back by Thursday afternoon, bringing Louise and Madame S—— with me."

Miss Digby smilingly said:

"You can go *now*, without compromising your dignity or authority, and I warmly second the proposed journey. Say everything that is kind and affectionate for me, and assure our young absentee that no refer-

ence will be made to what happened before she went away."

"Tell her, too, papa, that I have been completely lost without her, and I cannot express how glad I am that she is coming back," said Alice. "I would not say that to her in my letters, because I thought she would not believe me—but she will now, and be glad to know it too."

There was yet time to reach the station before the twelve train passed, and Mr. Balfour hastened to prepare for his brief journey. In parting he said to Miss Digby :

"The only cloud on our future has lifted, Ada, and I am most grateful on your account that Louise promises to give you no more annoyance. She will be a charge to you, but I believe she will hereafter try to do right."

"I can trust her and love her well enough to do for her all that can develop her native goodness and truth," she replied, with a smile, and he went away thinking himself among the most fortunate of men—as he certainly was.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FACE TO FACE ONCE MORE.

BY Wednesday afternoon all the preparations for the modest bridal were completed, and Miss Digby had retired to her own room to rest after the fatigues of the day, for she had superintended everything herself.

A letter was brought in to her which she read with some surprise, and more interest. It was from Walter Thorne, and read as follows:

BEACH HOUSE, July 31, 18—.

MY DEAR ADA:—You will think this a very familiar address after what has passed within the last four years, but I have buried the dagger, and I hope that you are equally ready to forgive and forget.

“I acknowledge that I treated you discourteously, but in those days I had much to aggravate me and make my temper more difficult to manage than it naturally is; though Heaven knows—and so do you—that it is bad enough at the best. I don’t try to make myself out better than I am, but I am not quite such a wretch as some people think me.

“I hope that a better day is dawning for me; that sweeter influences may come into my life than any I have lately known. I have long wished to see you and speak with you on a subject of vital interest to me, but I did not know how to reopen the intercourse so abruptly closed by myself, with any prospect of having my advances tolerated. The invitation to your approaching marriage which was kindly given me by Mr. Balfour afforded the opportunity I so earnestly desired, and I accepted it at once.

“I have established myself at the village hotel for a few days, as I did not wish to impose myself upon you as a guest during my stay. I shall attend your wedding, and as your nearest kinsman, give you away, if you will permit me to do so. I shall do this with great pleasure, feeling that in some measure the wrong committed so long ago against yourself and Mr. Balfour is

at length righted, and those brought together who should never have been severed by a ruthless and unscrupulous act on the part of my father.

"I write this to ask you to assist me to right another wrong which was committed at his command. I am most anxious to ascertain from you if you have maintained a correspondence with that unhappy girl who was placed under your care by myself so many years ago? If you can afford me a clue to her present place of residence, I shall be glad, for I have long wished to meet her again, and if I find it possible to re-light the flame she once inspired we may follow the example of yourself and Mr. Balfour.

"Will you receive me for half an hour this evening? I shall esteem it a great favor if you will, and I promise not to trespass beyond the time named.

"Respectfully,

W. THORNE.

In her eagerness to show this request to Claire, Miss Digby forgot her weariness. She hastily dispatched a line to Thorne, requesting him to come to the cottage at eight o'clock, and then went to her friend.

She found Claire quietly reading a new novel, and with a radiant smile her friend said:

"Put aside your book, my dear. I have something that is far more exciting for your perusal."

Claire languidly extended her hand, but when her eyes fell upon the writing so long unfamiliar to them, she started up flushing crimson. Miss Digby sat down and watched her as she read the lines relating to herself. Her lip curled half disdainfully, and her brows contracted. When she had finished, she calmly refolded the letter and gave it back to her friend.

Finding that she did not speak, Miss Digby impatiently said :

“ Well, Claire, what do you think of this opening to a reconciliation with Walter, and a re-union on a safer basis than the one you propose? ”

“ I think it very characteristic of Mr. Thorne to make his tardy justice conditional on the impression made upon himself by the object of his compassion. He retains some sentimental reminiscences of that period of his life, and if he finds his deserted wife as attractive as he wishes her to be, he may deign to throw her the handkerchief. *I* am not to be accepted on such terms, Ada, and I shall adhere to my own plans. When he comes, you may tell him of my life in Paris—of the lovers that surrounded me; of the gay and brilliant *role* I played; and leave him to infer that the heart of such a butterfly of fashion has no place left in it for him. I will cast my spells over him here, and if I find that he still adheres to his intention of seeking me in France, I promise you to tell him the truth and forego the retaliation I have planned. But you must give him no hint—you must leave me to play out my own comedy to the end.”

“ Is this your irrevocable determination, Claire? ”

“ It is—I wish to test the sincerity of his desire for atonement. If he is led away from it by the attraction of one he believes a stranger, I shall know how much it is worth.”

“ But if you marry him, that knowledge will not increase your chances of happiness.”

“ I do not expect such an impossibility—I ask only for justice at Mr. Thorne’s hands, and I must attain it in my own way. I am glad he is coming hither this

evening. I will walk on the beach with Alice, and return in time to be presented to him before he leaves. Manage so that our first interview shall take place on the portico where the moonlight will not betray any change in my expression. For seventeen years I have dragged the chain with which he fettered me, and now he shall feel some of its weight himself."

Miss Digby sighed, and arose from her seat—she said—"I will aid you to regain your position as Walter's wife, since I see your heart is set on it; but I do it with the conviction that you will both yet find peace, and content with each other. If I did not think so, I should have many qualms of conscience for consenting to countenance the deception you are so eager to carry out."

The door closed on her, as she ceased speaking, and Claire started up, all her inertia gone, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling with triumph—she paced the floor rapidly for many moments in silence, but she paused at length beside a window, and pantingly muttered:

"He comes to be vanquished, and I shall be the victor. Yet if he would not succumb—if he would only remain true to his present intention, I could forgive him—could take him back with the same love I once felt. But if he yields—if he yields to my fascinations believing me to be other than I am, I will crush my own heart sooner than respond to his passion after the little month of bliss I have awarded him has passed away. I will pay him back in his own coin, and base as it is, it will be good enough for him."

She threw herself upon a sofa, and buried her face in the pillows trying to compose the tumultuous throb-

bing of her heart, and regain perfect self-control before the hour for meeting Thorne arrived.

Claire was so far successful that when she appeared at supper, her friend could perceive no traces of the struggle through which she had passed, except that she was a little paler than usual. Miss Digby noticed that she had made an exquisite toilette, and looked unusually lovely even for her.

It was past seven when they arose from the table, and Claire said to Alice :

“ Let us walk on the beach, my dear, while Ada receives an old friend who is coming to call on her. We can return in time to be presented to him.”

Alice gladly assented, and the two presently issued from the gate, the young girl wearing a wide-brimmed hat, and her companion draped in a black lace mantle which was thrown over her head in the Spanish fashion.

As they moved toward the beach a gentleman was seen approaching the house they had left; he was walking forward very leisurely, occasionally kicking the pebbles upon his path, and seemed to be in no particular hurry to keep his appointment.

“ Why should he be anxious to learn the whereabouts of a woman to whom he had been worse than indifferent for so many years,” was the bitter thought of Claire, for she knew this must be Walter Thorne. “ He only wishes to make his peace with Ada by pretending to feel a desire to do what is right, now that he has the power to act for himself. Well—we shall soon see what will come of it all.”

They passed within a few yards of each other, and Thorne lifted his hat to them. In that brief glance,

Claire saw how little he had changed. In his maturity he was even handsomer, she thought, than in his early youth, and for a moment, the old glamour returned, and she could have sprang toward him as of old, and buried her head upon the breast which had once so tenderly sheltered it. But the impulse passed as quickly as it arose; the gulf again opened between them, and slightly bowing, she folded her veil over her face, and walked rapidly onward.

Thorne paused a moment and looked after them.

“What a graceful woman,” he thought—“she steps like a goddess—and the girl is pretty too—Old Balfour’s daughter I suppose, but the other must be some new friend of Ada’s. I hope she is handsome and agreeable, or this wedding will be a dead bore to me. I would never have come to it at all but for my desire to find out what she can tell me about Claire. Pshaw! why do I cling to that memory?—she may have found some one to console her long ago.”

He resumed his walk, humming a favorite air, and presently entered the yard, and sauntered toward the house. Miss Digby came out to receive him, and they shook hands with each other as quietly as if they had met the week before. She said:

“It is pleasanter on the portico this warm evening, and I have had chairs brought out. Shall we sit here, or do you prefer going in?”

“Let us remain here, by all means. There is a pretty view of the sea, and the moon will be rising over it presently.”

After he was seated, he went on:

“I am much obliged to you, Ada, for according me your forgiveness. I behaved like a brute the last time

we met, but I thought I had cause to complain of you, and my temper got the upperhand of me, as you know it is apt to do. Since those days I have been sorry for many things I did, and I would have made the amende long ago if I had known how to set about it. You may imagine how glad I was to accept the olive branch held out by Mr. Balfour, though he was not aware of the service he was doing me."

"I have forgiven you long ago Walter, and I would have served you if you had allowed me to do so. I wished to take May under my care, but you would not consent. If you desired a reconciliation with me, why did you not avail yourself of the offer I made you, when I heard of the death of Agnes, to receive her here?"

Thorne frowned and bit his lip at this straightforward question. He coldly said:

"I had some such thought at first, but May offended me by setting herself in opposition to my wishes with reference to an affair that was important to me. I spoke in anger to her, and told her she should remain at Thornhill till she showed a proper respect for me. That is why I declined the offer you made, Ada, but I was not ungrateful for it, though in my vexation toward my daughter, I replied more curtly than I should."

"Who is the companion of May, for of course you have not left her through all these months with no lady to take charge of her?"

Miss Digby knew perfectly well that he *had* done so, but she chose to assume that even Walter Thorne would be incapable of such treatment to his only child. He flushed, and impatiently replied:

“For a few months May was without a governess; but I have lately found a lady suited to the position, and she is now established at Thornhill. I have not yet received from my daughter the submission that I exact, or I should have brought her hither with me. You need have no fears on her account, Ada, for she is well looked after by Mrs. Black.”

“I am happy to hear it,” drily replied Miss Digby, “for I have thought a great deal of her lonely position since the death of her mother. I hoped that May would have written to me herself, but she has not done so.”

With apparent frankness, Thorne said :

“She wished me to invite you to take up your abode at Thornhill, but I knew that to be impossible while you retained the charge of Mr. Balfour’s daughters. If May had shown a proper respect for my wishes, I would have brought her to you myself, and entreated you to receive her, also ; but she is her mother’s own child, and—and I believe she regards me as her natural enemy.”

His companion cast a penetrating glance at him, which said, plainly enough :

“If such is the fact, is it not your own fault ? ” but she did not speak the words which she knew would be so offensive to him. She only said :

“I wish there was yet time to bring her hither before a change is made—but we go next week to Cape May, and if you choose, May can join our party there.”

“We will settle about that hereafter,” was the curt reply. “I did not come hither to be catechized about May, for she has annoyed me so much that I do not care to think of her when I can help it. Who were

the two ladies I met going to the beach as I came hither ? ”

“ The younger one was Alice Balfour—her companion is a friend of mine, who has recently returned from a tour in Europe. You will find Madame L’Epine a very accomplished and elegant woman—and she has had a great desire to see you.”

“ To see me ! then perhaps, while in Europe, she may have met with——Ada, I came hither to ask if you will tell me all you know of Claire. You have corresponded with her, I suppose ? Where is she ? What has she been doing through this long interval of time in which I have refrained from seeking to know anything about her ? ”

“ I can tell you this much, Walter : she did not break her heart over your desertion,” said Miss Digby, with a little spice of malice, good woman as she was. “ Claire sensibly accepted the position thrust upon her, and made the best of it. She went to Paris, as you know, and sought out her brother ; he was a wealthy banker, and he used his fortune magnificently for the gratification of his young sister. M. Latour had no family of his own, and he lavished on Claire everything that money could command. He settled on her an estate of greater value than the one your father believed Agnes would possess ; and if he had been aware of Claire’s existence before she arrived in Paris, he would have dowered her so nobly that even Colonel Thorne must have been reconciled to the romantic marriage you made.”

“ All of which only proves what blind, short-sighted creatures we are. If it is true that all mortals have a good and an evil angel contending forever for the mas-

tery over them, the latter must often have got the best of it when the battle was fought over me. My life has been a sad failure, Ada, for I have brought misery to others, and, in so doing, have made myself wretched. I do not attempt to play the character of a puling sentimentalist for the purpose of enlisting your sympathies, for I hardly deserve that they shall be wasted upon me; but I should have been a better man if such adverse influences had not been brought to bear upon me."

"I believe that, Walter;—I can do you that much justice; though I think you might have found more contentment in your last marriage had you acted differently toward poor Agnes. She loved you devotedly when she became your wife."

With sudden passion, Thorne said:

"It is easy to reason about the actions of others, and condemn them, although the censors would have done no better, had they been placed in the same position. You understand human nature, Ada Digby, and you must know that the very devotion of a woman who was forced on my acceptance was distasteful to me—that it aroused in me the tyrant's will to crush her who had been instrumental in destroying my first beautiful dream of love and constancy to the one woman I have ever loved. If Agnes had not presumed to act the part of the injured party, when she discovered the truth, I might have acted differently—I think I should; but her temper was as bitter as mine, and—well, you know the result, and we will not speak of it."

"No—let us not speak of what is irrevocable. Do you wish me to understand that you still cherish your early preference for Claire, Walter?"

Thorne hesitated a moment, and then said :

“ I can scarcely assert so much as that. If I could see her again as lovely, as bewitching, and as much devoted to me as in those early days, I would gladly return to my old allegiance ; but from what you said just now, I am led to believe that Claire has stifled all memory of that bitter past, and she may, long ere this, have found some one to console her for my desertion.”

“ She has led a gay and brilliant life, but she has not married again, if that is what you mean.”

“ But she must have had many lovers. So beautiful a creature as Claire was, placed in the position you describe, can scarcely have remained true to her first love, even if she has not chosen to give her hand to any of her adorers. I have thought of her a great deal since Agnes died. My first impulse was to seek her out ; but I reflected that it might be only to meet the scorn and contempt I am sure she feels for him who had not the courage to defy opposition, and stand by the pledges he had made. My fate has been a very untoward one, Ada, but I have myself to blame for it, as much as the tyrannical will of my father.”

“ If you seek Claire in good faith, Walter—if you are willing to restore her to her true position, even if she is not so attractive as in those early days, she may be touched by your return to your old love, and receive you kindly. But I must tell you that her brother died a ruined man, and she sacrificed the greater portion of her own settlement to liquidate the debts he left behind him.”

After a pause he replied :

“ If I can arrange my affairs here, I shall go to Europe in a few months. When I have seen Claire,

and understand my own wishes better than I do now, I shall decide as to my course of action. I wished very earnestly to learn something of her from you, but she may be so much changed in every respect from what she was, that—that—the dead love may not again spring to life in either her heart or mine.”

“As to the last I cannot answer, of course; but that she is still considered an attractive and charming woman I can assure you on the authority of my friend, Madame L’Epine.”

“She knew her then—has met with her in society?”

“Yes—she knows her intimately—in fact I believe that there is some tie of relationship between them.”

“What induced Miss Digby to say this she could hardly have explained herself. She found herself unconsciously taking sides with her friend against the man who wavered in the manly and straightforward course which would have saved him from playing the part that had been decreed to him by the woman he was incapable of considering before himself. His egotistical fears that the object of his early passion would prove less adorable—less easy of approach, than the trusting child whose opening life had been blighted by him, disgusted her, and took from her all desire to thwart the wishes of Claire.

By her last assertion she prepared Thorne for any resemblance he might detect between his repudiated wife and the lady who was so soon to be presented to him as a stranger; for Miss Digby began to think that it would be best for Claire to win him without allowing a suspicion of her identity to dawn upon him. *If* he approved her, he would condescend to repair the wrong of which she had been the victim; if not the

inference was obvious, that he would act as if the past had never been.

Her kindly heart hardened toward him ; she remembered all his harshness to Agnes, and she thought that he merited retribution, if ever a man did. From that moment she surrendered him to Claire to work her spell on, either for weal or for woe. She would remain passive, and hold sacred the confidence reposed in her.

Thorne asked with some appearance of interest.

“Is there any family resemblance between this lady and Claire ? I was not aware that she had any relations in this country.”

“Madame L’Epine was born in Virginia, and was one of the Courtnay family,” replied Miss Digby, with perfect coolness. “You know that Claire’s mother was also a Miss Courtnay. I can imagine that, at her age, Claire would look very much as Madame L’Epine now does.”

“Then I can form some idea of what changes have taken place in *ma belle* Rosebud, as I used to call her,” he replied, with a light laugh. “But I can hardly expect the mature flower from which the first glory has departed, to be as captivating as the rose with all its sweetest leaves unfolded.”

“You can soon judge for yourself, for I hear the voice of Alice, and in a few moments she will be here.”

Two figures came up the walk : the full moon had risen and was casting long level beams of light over the restless sea and illuminating the portico on which Miss Digby and her guest sat. Thorne scarcely glanced at Alice ; his whole attention was concentrated on her companion, and he thought he had never seen so grace-

ful a woman as Claire came forward with perfect command of face and mien, though her heart was throbbing as if it would burst from her bosom. She had suffered the shrouding folds of lace to fall back from her head, and as she stepped upon the portico the moonlight revealed her fair face fully to those upon it. Miss Digby marvelled at its serene repose, and Thorne was, for a moment, bewildered by the throng of thoughts and feelings that rushed upon him. *This* woman, lovely as a poet's ideal—graceful and self-possessed as a marble Diana, a fair representative of what Claire might have become in the lapse of years! Impossible! It was simply absurd for Miss Digby to have suggested such a thing. She did not look more than five and twenty at the utmost, and Claire must be over thirty.

Such were the thoughts that rushed through Walter Thorne's mind as he arose and drew forward seats for the two who had just entered. He was dazzled, bewildered by the vision of loveliness before him, but he could see little of the resemblance of which Miss Digby had spoken. He recalled an impassioned, unformed child, bewitching in her young beauty, but this was a mature and most exquisite type of woman, with an air of repose and high breeding in striking contrast to the impulsive being who had won his first love. She was taller by several inches than the Claire he remembered, and there was a depth and richness in the tones of her voice unknown to it in those early days in which she set Walter Thorne upon a pedestal and worshipped him as the embodiment of all that is noble in man.

When the introduction was over, and they were all seated, Claire was the first to speak:

“I am happy to meet with you, Mr. Thorne, for

you are not so much of a stranger to me as you may suppose. I have heard you often spoken of, and I had a desire to see you before I again leave this country."

"I am sure I am much flattered, Madame, that you should entertain such a desire: that is, if it is not the offspring of curiosity alone, and the wish to judge for yourself of a man who has had little good said of him, I am afraid. I may not merit all the censures that have been lavished upon me, but I deserve enough of them to render me very grateful for the good opinion of the few who still look on me as worthy of their friendship."

"He who can make friends must also make enemies," replied Claire, with her enchanting smile.

And the dark eyes that were lifted to his thrilled through him as if he had received an electric shock. She dropped them, and went on:

"I never form my judgments from hearsay, especially of those in whom I am interested. I like originality, and even a spice of *diablerie* in a strong nature does not appal me. But pray excuse me; I am speaking as if we were old acquaintances instead of being in the first stage of what I hope will prove an agreeable and lasting friendship. You may judge from that if the person who spoke of you to me endeavored to prejudice me against you."

"I am sure I am much obliged to—to that person, whoever it may have been," Thorne replied, with some embarrassment. "The friendship of a fair lady accustomed to every homage from my sex is an honor I scarcely merit; but as it is so generously offered, I shall be most happy to lay claim to so precious a boon."

"Thank you for accepting my banter. I have a

cause to win when we are well enough acquainted for me to approach you as a true friend."

Thorne bowed deferentially, and replied :

"No cause advocated by Madame L'Epine is likely to fail. I am only too highly honored by the interest you manifest in my affairs."

"Take care ; do not pledge yourself to more than you may be willing to perform," she replied, with an air of gay badinage which he found infinitely fascinating.

Then turning to Miss Digby, Claire changed the subject :

"Is not this an exquisite night? I felt tempted to walk for hours on the beach, but I remembered that you did not wish Alice to linger too long in the night air, and I thought it best to come back."

"That was well remembered, my dear, for I wish both yourself and Alice to be in perfect health and spirits to-morrow evening. Beautiful as the night is, a faint mist is beginning to rise from the water, and I think we had better go into the house."

"Not quite yet," Claire entreated. "This moonlight is so enchanting, that I shrink from exchanging it for the glare of the lamp."

Miss Digby yielded, and the conversation flowed on, each one bearing a part in it, for half an hour longer. Then the visitor reluctantly arose, and said :

"I will not trespass on your hospitality longer to-night, Ada, although I find myself in a more congenial atmosphere than any in which I have lately lived. I thank you again most heartily for the chance to renew the peace between us, and I assure you that on my side it shall not be endangered again. I intend to fol-

low the advice my old nurse used to give me, and turn over a new leaf in my life, on which I hope to inscribe something better than has gone before."

Miss Digby gave him her hand, and cordially replied:

"If you are true to your pledge, Walter, no one will rejoice in it more than myself. I shall expect you to-morrow evening, and I grant the request you made to act as my nearest kinsman. Good-night."

"Good-night," fell from the lips of Claire, as she bowed, smiled, and lifted a bewildering glance to his face. She saw that he flushed even in the pale moonlight, and with a sense of triumph mingled with pain, she felt that the first step toward the victory for which she had so sedulously prepared herself had been taken.

She stood watching his retreating figure till the gate closed on him, and then with a faint sigh turned to Alice, who was saying:

"What a distinguished-looking man Mr. Thorne is. I am sure no one would think that he has a daughter nearly as old as I am. Will he bring her with him to-morrow, Aunt Ada?"

"No, my dear; but I hope that we can induce him to bring May to us when we are settled at Cape May. I should like to have her with me, for I take a deep interest in her."

"If Madame L'Epine asks him to do so, I believe he will," said Alice, mischievously. "I think he was evidently charmed by her, for he looked at and listened to her as if he had no thought for anyone else near him."

"Jealous, *petite*," laughed Claire, tapping her on the cheek with an affectation of playfulness she was far

from feeling at that moment. "I am not sure that he will not prefer your budding charms after all to my more mature ones. Men of his age are apt to admire the sweet simplicity of early youth."

"He is hardly old enough for that. Mr. Thorne does not look more than thirty, though I suppose he is a few years older."

"I dare say he would be immensely flattered if he heard you say that, Alice, for he is nearer forty than thirty. I agree with you that he is handsome and *distingué*, but a man should be something more than that."

"Yes, good and true like papa; and Mr. Thorne is gay, reckless, what some people call fast, I have heard. But he is very agreeable for all that. Don't you think so, Madame? If you don't, you are very ungrateful, for he evidently admires you very much."

"So much the worse for him then," said Claire, with another laugh that sounded strangely to the young girl, and she more gravely said:

"Pardon me for attempting to banter you on such a subject. I am too young to take such a liberty; but you are so good to me that I forgot myself."

Claire kissed her, and gayly said:

"No harm has been done, my dear; and you know that I allow you to speak to me with perfect freedom. Let us go in, for the night is becoming chilly."

She shivered as she spoke, and drew her lace mantle over her shoulders. Alice threw her arm caressingly around her, and they followed Miss Digby, who had already gone in, and was waiting for them in the hall.

Daily intercourse with Claire for the few past weeks had awakened in the heart of Alice one of those en-

thusiastic attachments often felt by a young girl on the threshold of life for a brilliant and beautiful woman of mature years. They were fast friends, for Claire also found much to interest her in the affectionate and simple-hearted girl who so naïvely expressed her admiration for herself.

They went into the library, and Claire sat down before the open piano, and dashed into a piece of music, which well expressed the state of her own soul. It was yet too early to retire, and feeling herself incapable of taking part in any conversation however trivial, she took refuge in music, mechanically playing piece after piece with such brilliancy and power as even she rarely displayed.

When ten o'clock rang out from the bronze timepiece on the mantel, she abruptly rose and said :

"I believe I will retire now, for I am afraid that I have wearied you both with playing so long."

"I have enjoyed it," said Miss Digby, quietly, "and so, I am sure, has Alice. I have never heard you play with such brilliancy before."

"You must have thrown your soul into the music to produce such an effect," said Alice ; "but I think it must be a very stormy soul, in spite of the beauty of the night."

Claire looked at her with eyes glittering with excitement, and laughing faintly, said :

"You will never understand the inspiration of that music, Alice, for your nature and mine are wide as the poles asunder. When you say your prayers to-night, thank Heaven that it is so, my dear, for you are formed for quiet happiness, and I feel at this moment as if I were born to dwell in a tornado, and scatter lightnings

with reckless disregard as to where the bolt may strike."

Alice looked at her with wondering eyes, but she made no reply, for Miss Digby arose, and said :

"The fatigues of the day have been too much for you, Claire, and you are in one of your moods. Let us retire at once. Good night, Alice—I will come to your room before you are asleep, but I wish to talk with Madame L'Epine alone a few moments."

Claire had gone to the open window, and was leaning from it that the cool air of night might allay the fever in the blood that seemed seething in her veins. Alice did not venture to approach her, for the hand of Miss Digby warned her not to do so. She left the room, wondering what had occurred to produce such a state of excitement in the calm and stately woman she so much admired."

When she was gone, Miss Digby drew near the window, and softly said :

"My dear Claire, this meeting has been too much for you. Yet you bore yourself so gracefully and naturally through the ordeal, that I own it surprises me to see you give way so suddenly now."

Claire looked around with a face as colorless as marble, and almost as rigid. She saw that Alice had left them, and she made a step towards Miss Digby, and threw herself into her arms, with a sobbing cry that seemed to be rent from the depths of her soul.

It was many moment before she could speak, and her friend almost carried her to a sofa, and sat down beside her, still supporting her shuddering form.

At length, in faint, broken tones, she said :

"Oh! Ada, it was worse than death to sit before

him calm to all outward seeming, and remember those days in which we were all in all to each other ; to feel that we were so near, yet so far apart, almost maddened me. Yet I betrayed nothing—tell me, did I give him cause to suspect anything ? ”

“ No. I marveled at your composure, and wondered at your daring in speaking as you did to him when you first met.”

“ Ah ! that is part of my plan you know. I am to use my influence to bring him back to his first allegiance, and if he would only prove true, and honorable, I would forego my revenge—yes, forego it—and be glad to make him a happier and, perhaps, a better man. But he will not, Ada ! He will give up all thoughts of the injured wife, and seek his own gratification, as he always has done, at the sacrifice of principle. Already has a new passion been kindled in his heart for one he believes a stranger. He will leave poor Claire to be ‘ whistled down the wind a prey to fortune,’ while he suns himself in the smiles of the one he is ready to give her as a rival, unconscious that the two are identical.”

“ Well, my dear, why should you complain of that ? If Walter has conceived so sudden a passion for you, it only proves that you are his true mate, and great was the iniquity that separated you. Do not be too exacting, Claire, but accept the late atonement, even if it is offered to you as a stranger.”

Claire raised her head, and with sudden self-control, said :

“ Yes, I shall accept it, as I have already assured you. But it would be well for him to listen to my pleadings in behalf of his deserted wife. If he did *that*,

I would reveal myself to him, ask his forgiveness for all I have planned to torture him in his turn, and try to make him happy. But he will not, Ada, you will see—you will see.”

There was sharp anguish in the tone in which the last words were uttered, and she burst in tears.

Miss Digby said all that was possible to soothe her, and bring her back to calmness, but it was long before she succeeded. When they at last separated for the night, the last words of Claire to her friend were :

“Remember that my secret must be kept at all hazards. I must try him, and if there is any gold left in the dross of his nature, he will respond to my wishes. If there is not—then God help me !”

Echoing the passionate prayer, Miss Digby kissed her, and left her at the door of her own chamber.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WEDDING.

ON the following morning there was a joyful reunion at Seaview cottage. Louise arrived, accompanied by Madame S——; but Mr. Balfour stopped at the village hotel with the Episcopal clergyman he had brought with him to perform the ceremony.

Louise was looking delicate and slightly worn—but she was her old affectionate self; and the way she clung to Miss Digby proved that her late feelings toward her had undergone an entire revolution. As her friend held her in her arms, the child whispered :

“Dear *mother*, if you were not the best woman in the world, you could not so freely and fully forgive your wayward child. I am yours now in heart—in everything; and to make myself like you in goodness and sweetness of nature is my first wish. Since I wrote that letter I have dreamed again of my own mamma, and she smiled on me as only an angel spirit can smile, and whispered to my inner sense: ‘At last you are on the right path, my darling; guided by the loving heart that seeks to influence you only for your own good, you will find the pearl of great price, and through its renovating power, mature into noble and true womanhood.’”

Miss Digby clasped her more tenderly to her heart, and kissing her on brow and lips, fervently said:

“I accept the charge thus delegated to me, Louise, and I will be to you all that your own mother could have been had she lived to watch over you.”

She released her and advanced to welcome Madame S——; for in her impatience to see her friends again, Louise had sprung from the carriage as soon as it stopped, and rushed toward the house with all the impetuosity of her nature.

The French woman was presented to Claire; and delighted to find one who knew Paris so well and spoke her own language so charmingly, she soon plunged into an animated conversation, and in an hour was so much at home that she began to busy herself in helping to arrange the flowers with which Claire had undertaken to decorate the rooms.

Alice went with her sister to their own apartment; and Louise, after taking off her hat and mantle, turned to her, and throwing her arms around her, said:

“You have not told me yet that you forgive me for all I did before I went away, Alice. I will tell you the truth, sister, as a just penance.

“I was afraid that *you* would be best loved by our new mother, and I could not bear the thought that both papa and you should come before *me*. I was jealous of everything. I hated to have mamma’s place filled, because papa would care more for the new wife than he did for me; because you would give her more love than you could afford to me. Was it not selfish and base to feel so? But I am getting over that—I am trying to deserve to be loved, and then I shall have as much love as I have a right to.”

“Oh, Lou., we all love you dearly, be sure of that—we would do anything for you; and if you will only keep in this reasonable frame of mind, we shall be as happy together as people are in fairy tales. You must not speak of yourself as base, for there is no such taint in your true and affectionate nature.”

The communion between the sisters was long and tender, but at length Alice arose from the sofa on which they sat, clasped in each other’s arms, and said:

“Come, dear, we must not forget others in the joy of our reunion. I promised to assist Madame L’Epine to decorate the rooms with flowers, and you must lend us the aid of your nimble fingers, too.”

“Oh, how gladly I will do it, Alice. I feel like a bird released from its cage, and in place of waiting and gnashing my teeth as I thought I would the day papa got married again, I could dance for joy. You don’t know how kind he was to me—how tender, even when I was so naughty. When he came for me the other day, I felt ashamed to meet him; but he soon made

me feel that I was so completely forgiven that he would not even remember how severely I had tried him. He took me to Philadelphia, and allowed me to choose such beautiful things for myself!"

"Neither did Aunt Ada forget you, Louise. She thought all the time that you would come to your right senses before the wedding, and she had dresses made up for you as handsomely as mine. We are going to Cape May next week, and we shall need them there."

"She thought of me and provided for me, even when I was doing everything I could to worry and annoy her. Oh, Alice, if I ever fall back into my old perversity, I shall deserve to be awfully punished."

"There is little danger of that, Lou. You have had your trial, and come out of it as good as gold. If you should be in danger of relapsing, think of your dream, and you will cast from you the temptation to do so."

"Yes, that will help me," she replied, in a hushed tone.

"Oh, Alice! I saw mamma as plainly as I see you now, and since that night a new spirit seems to have entered my heart. I believe that henceforth she will be my guardian angel, and aid me to check every mean and ungenerous feeling as it arises."

"With that belief, dear, you can never go very far wrong again," said Alice with starting tears, for the memory of her mother was very dear to her, though she had not been so unreasonable as to insist that her father should sacrifice his happiness to it.

The flower party was a merry one in spite of the various emotions which had so lately agitated at least two of them. Claire, with the long habit of self-con-

trol, had recovered outward serenity, and she looked as bright and animated as if no struggle had lately convulsed her soul to its inmost depths.

There was no regular dinner that day, for in the dining room the wedding supper was set out, and the doors locked. A tray filled with edibles was brought into the library, and the feminine party gathered around it and ate with appetite after the exercise of the morning.

The rooms looked beautiful with their floral decorations, and every one complimented Claire on the taste which had produced so charming an effect.

Later in the evening she presided over the toilette of the bride, and then retired to make her own. Miss Digby had refused to be married in white, as she declared it to be unsuitable to her age. She wore a pearl gray silk trimmed with point lace, with a collar of the same fastened at the throat with a diamond pin, the bridal gift of Mr. Balfour. Her hair was folded in smooth bands around her finely-shaped head, and fastened in a knot behind which lay low upon her neck. A few gray hairs threaded her abundant locks, but they were scarcely noticeable amid the shining coils, and as she stood beside her dressing stand drawing her perfectly fitting gloves on her shapely hands, she was a regally handsome woman still.

Louise came in, robed in floating clouds of tulle looped with white rosebuds, and shyly carrying something in her hand which she held behind her. She looked up at the beaming face that welcomed her and exclaimed :

“ Oh, mother ! how handsome you are ! I never saw you look so well before, but it is because you are happy, I suppose.”

“Yes, Louise, I am happy. This evening I assume responsibilities the discharge of which will render the remaining days of my life of more value than its hey-day has been. You shall be the first to kiss me in my bridal robes, and with the caress take the promise that you shall have as tender a place in my heart as it has to give.”

She bent forward and Louise raised herself on tip-toe to reach her lips; at the same moment the concealed hand went up, and a wreath of orange blossoms was dextrously placed on the bent head of the bride.

Louise hurriedly said:

“That is my offering, mother, and if you refuse to wear it I shall think that you have not forgiven the insolent impertinence of which I was guilty in my letter to Alice. I bought it for you myself, and—and it is beautiful and very becoming.”

Miss Digby glanced at herself in the mirror, and with a smile said:

“Even if I found the flowers unbecoming, Louise, I would not refuse to wear them under the circumstances. But I agree with you that with a little arrangement they will complete my toilette more tastefully than if I had done without them. Use your skillful fingers, my dear, in putting the last touches to my costume.”

Louise was enraptured! Miss Digby placed herself on a low seat, and the wreath was twined around the coils of her hair with graceful effect: a kiss fell on them when all was done, and Louise humbly said:

“Never, if I can help it, will I do anything to turn a thread of this to silver. You have been an angel of goodness to me ever since I have been with you, and

yet I could give you so much pain as I have lately done."

"My darling, your *latest* actions have only afforded me exquisite happiness by proving to me that my Louise possesses all the generous and noble traits of character for which I have given her credit. There, love, do not excite yourself; you must not shed a tear, even in penitence, on this evening."

Louise wiped away the bright drops that glistened on her long lashes, and with a brilliant smile turned to greet her sister who had just entered, attired in a robe similar to her own. Alice glanced at the flowers and gayly said:

"I told her you would wear them for her sake, and you look charmingly in them, Aunt Ada; oh! I forgot, you are my mother now, and I must give you the name you have long had in my heart."

She knelt before her, raised the hand that was still ungloved, and placed on the third finger a diamond solitaire: then lifting it to her lips, Alice went on—"This is my offering, and papa will place over it the guard in the shape of the wedding-ring."

As Alice arose, Miss Digby kissed her, and thanked her for the superb gift which sparkled on her finger. She regarded the two sisters with benignant eyes, and softly added, as she placed a hand on the shoulder of each:

"After all, I can say as the Roman mother did, 'These are my jewels.' My daughters shall be as the polished corners of the temple of happiness of which I hope to be the high priestess in the years that loom before us. I have prayed earnestly to be only a minister of good to those with whom I am about to link

my fate, and I have faith to believe that my prayer will be granted."

"I am sure it will," came simultaneously from the lips of both girls.

At that moment a tap was struck upon the door, and Claire entered. She wore a robe of pale azure silk, striped with silver, and trimmed with puffings of tulle. Her fair neck and rounded arms were bare, and a parure of exquisite cameos completed the simple yet elegant toilette. Her magnificent nut-brown hair was coiled around her small head in a fashion peculiar to herself, and over the left ear drooped a single spray of fresh rosebuds gathered from the garden.

Few who looked on that brilliant and most lovely face would have dreamed of the sea of sorrow through which she had battled—of the surging waves of the storm that was again rising to drive her bark of life on the same rocks from which it had once so narrowly escaped utter shipwreck.

Her eyes glittered with unrest, and her scarlet lips quivered with repressed emotion, but she did not shrink or falter. She felt that she would be sufficient to herself in the ordeal she was about to encounter, and she dreaded no further passionate outbreak on her own part similar to the one of the previous night.

She smilingly said :

"The guests have all arrived, everything is in readiness, and Mr. Balfour awaits permission to come for you. Shall I unclothe the magic portal and bid him enter?"

"I am quite ready," replied Miss Digby. "If I were a vain woman, I should be unwilling for the three graces to pass before me ; but as I am not, I wish

you to walk between Alice and Louise, and precede Mr. Balfour and myself. You will distract attention from the elderly couple coming after you."

Claire laughed archly, and replied :

"If you only knew how royally handsome you are to-night, Ada, you would not consider such a diversion necessary. However, it shall be as you wish. A woman has the right to have her own way on the evening on which she relinquishes it forever."

She opened the door which gave into the hall, and made a sign to one of a group of gentlemen standing a short distance from it. Mr. Balfour came forward at once, and in a few more moments the party came forth, arranged as the bride had wished.

When they reached the parlor, the minister was in his place. Walter Thorne stood ready to give the bride away, and the other guests, about twenty in number, invited the most of them by Mr. Balfour, were grouped together in different parts of the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RINGS OF FATE.

THE solemn and stately ceremony of the Episcopal church was gone through with in a most impressive manner, and the two who had in youth been so cruelly separated by an unscrupulous man were at last linked together by ties that only death might break.

Congratulations were offered, and the buzz of conversation became general. Claire was soon surrounded by

a circle of gentlemen who hastened to offer their homage to the most beautiful woman in the room, and she accepted it with the air of one to whom such tribute is due, dispensing her smiles and gay repartee with perfect impartiality among them.

Walter Thorne held himself a little aloof, but she saw that he was furtively watching her, even when he affected to be engaged in conversation with Alice, and she wondered if he suspected her incognita. A glance in a mirror reassured her, for in the brilliant woman of the world reflected from its surface she could see nothing to recall the Claire of other days.

When supper was announced Thorne took Alice in, but he managed to place himself opposite to the woman who so strangely interested him, that he might watch her mobile face and trace the resemblance to his repudiated wife of which Miss Digby had spoken. He found nothing to remind him of his lost Claire, save the color of the hair and eyes, and an occasional tone in the voice which thrilled through him as a strain of music once loved and familiar, but long unheard.

In the centre of the table stood the bride's cake, an elaborate structure highly ornamented, which had been ordered by Mr. Balfour when in Philadelphia. That gentleman called on Thorne to cut it, and laughingly said :

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is the mystic cake of fate ; imbedded in it are two rings obtained from a clairvoyant who declared that the gentleman and lady who respectively draw them are designed for each other. That both may not fall into the hands of the same sex, the sides of the cake in which they are to be found are appropriately embellished. Under the Cupid

crowned with flowers, the feminine ring will be found. On the opposite one, beneath the Bacchus wreathed with grapes, is the other."

This announcement caused quite a sensation among the guests, and one of the gentlemen remarked:

"The chances are not equal, Mr. Balfour, for there are at least two gentlemen to one lady present."

"What of that, my dear fellow? fate is too strong for us all, and if you are to be the lucky man, the ring would be yours if there were a thousand chances against you. Do your devoir, Mr. Thorne, and present the slices of destiny to the ladies, and I will do the same for the gentlemen."

There were two young girls present from the hotel in the village; they were spending the summer there with their brother, and on the strength of a romantic intimacy formed with Alice, they had been invited to be present. Blushing and giggling, they pressed toward the cake eager to see what the result would be; Miss Araminta Jones earnestly hoping that the rings might fall respectively to herself and a dashing young man from New York who had been very attentive to her since they met at the seaside, and her sister equally desirous that chance or destiny might give them to herself and a dilatory lover she was trying to bring to a proposal.

"La! Mr. Balfour, you don't suppose there will really be anything in it, if the rings should be drawn?" lisped Miss Araminta. "We won't be bound to take each other, you know, whether we like or not."

With mock gravity he replied:

"I have every reason to believe that these rings are messengers of fate, and those who draw them must abide the consequences."

“La! how horrid! I don’t think I shall tempt destiny then, for I might get paired off with some one I should not fancy,” and she glanced scornfully at a red-haired young man who had been for several weeks past making strenuous efforts to establish himself in her good graces.

“I cannot allow that, Miss Jones. It will never do to shirk destiny and defy the fates,” was the laughing response. “See this sacrificial knife: it will soon make as important revelations as those of the Roman augurs,” and he plunged the glittering blade into the heart of the cake, and cut through the portion in which the confectioner had assured him the ring was to be found.

Thorne did the same on the opposite side, and amid much laughter and gay badinage the baskets were piled up with snowy slices, and that belonging to the ladies was offered first.

The fair hand of Miss Jones fluttered over it uncertainly, and she said:

“Goodness! it is like having one’s fortune told.”

“It is more like a lottery in which there is one prize to a number of blanks,” said her sister. “Come, Minty, take your choice, and let somebody else have a chance.”

Thus urged, the fair Araminta daintily lifted a piece, and the next moment broke it into small bits with an air of vexed disappointment which caused the red-haired young man to smile serenely, for he was human, and he resented the speech she had pointed by looking at himself.

The sister followed with the same result; Alice then drew unsuccessfully, and as Louise declared herself too

young to take a chance in such a lottery as that, the basket was offered to Claire. She carelessly put out her hand, scarcely glancing around, for she was talking at the moment with one of her new admirers, and took up the first piece she touched.

Holding it in her hand, she turned again to resume the conversation, but Mr. Balfour gayly asked :

“How is it, Madame L’Epine? Are you the fortunate winner? I am curious to know, for the clairvoyant described to me the person who would draw the ring, and if she was a true seer, it has fallen to you.”

Claire flushed slightly, broke open the bit of cake, and took from it a gold ring, on which were two enameled hearts twined together with a wreath of forget-me-nots. She held it up with a smile and said :

“There it is, sure enough, but I scarcely expected a ‘grave seignior’ like yourself, Mr. Balfour, to attempt such a piece of legerdemain as this. Did you really and truly consult with a wise woman, and lay this trap for your unsuspecting guests?”

He laughed, shook his head and said :

“You must not be too inquisitive, lady fair. You are the prize to be contended for now, and I look for quite an animated contest on the part of the gentlemen for the possession of the other magic circlet. Ha! the distribution is already made, for but one piece is left for Thorne. As he has no choice he must take that.”

No sooner had Claire displayed her ring than many hands were put forth to select from the contents of the other basket, for each one was anxious to obtain what might at least entitle him to an animated flirtation with the attractive stranger. Many exclamations of chagrin were heard, and the voice of Thorne arose above them, saying :

“Behold ! the last shall be first—the prize is mine !” and he held up a heavy hoop of gold on which was engraved an altar from which a flame was ascending. “I only hope that you have not been hoaxing us by the story of the Sibyl, Balfour. If she is a true prophet, I shall regard myself as the most fortunate of men.”

He glanced at Claire as he spoke, and saw that she had become deadly pale. He offered her a glass of water across the table and respectfully said :

“Pardon me, Madame ; I had no idea that our nonsense could move you so deeply. It was I who suggested this folly to our host, and by a pardonable *ruse* I possessed myself of the ring. I felt the knife grate against it when I cut into the cake, and therefore I left the others to choose before me. I knew that it was to be found in the first piece laid in the plate, but if I had dreamed that by appropriating it myself I was doing what would cause you to feel annoyance, I should not have proclaimed the unfair victory I have won.”

Claire recovered her self-possession, and the color came back to her face as she smilingly said :

“I am too skeptical by nature to place faith in the oracle, even if the trial had been fairly made. It was a pleasant device to give interest to the drawing, but its significance amounts to nothing in my estimation, nor in yours, I am sure.”

She looked up at him as she spoke, and bewildered by the expression of those speaking eyes, he involuntarily rejoined :

“I wish to heaven it did ! but as you say, it is all nonsense. So much the worse for me.”

“So much the better, I should say,” was the indiffer-

ent reply, and she turned again to the gentleman with whom she had been conversing, and resumed the discussion the drawing had interrupted.

Miss Jones eagerly said :

“If you did not fairly get the ring, Mr. Thorne, I think there should be another trial.”

“I am sorry to differ from a lady, but I cannot agree with you. If the fates meant my rivals to win, they would have suggested to them that a hasty scramble for the first piece they could grasp was not the way to do it. I gave them every chance to cheat me of the ring, but as they left it to me, I accept the good the gods provide and am duly thankful.”

He ostentatiously placed it on his finger and held up his hand for general inspection. Those near him examined it in turn, and the New Yorker ventured to lisp a feeble witticism :

“An altaw to Hymen—pwetty, isn’t it, and appwopwiate ; you are the tallest man heah, and of course it belongs to you by wight, ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !”

“By wrong rather,” said Miss Araminta, with a curt laugh ; “but as *I* did not wish to win the other, I have no interest in it myself.”

“The widow seems vewy indiffewent about appwopwiating her pwize,” said the dandy, glancing toward the ring which Claire had dropped beside her plate, apparently forgetful of what had just passed.

Though this conversation passed in guarded tones, Thorne overheard every word, and he felt a strong inclination to treat Miss Araminta as Othello did his bride, and put as summary an end to her admirer in a less human fashion.

The party soon afterwards returned to the parlor ;

to the annoyance of Thorne, Claire was still monopolized by Mr. Norton, and he was glad when music was asked for. After some solicitation, she arose and went to the piano, followed by her new admirer. She played very brilliantly, but as if she was getting through a task she had set for herself, rather than as if she found any enjoyment in it herself.

Thorne placed himself where he could watch her without making it obvious that he was doing so, and the expression of vague sadness that settled on her features interested him more than he would have cared to have known. In seeking a renewal of friendly relations with Ada, his chief object was to learn something of Claire, that he might judge of the chances of success with her if he offered, at this late day, the only amende in his power; but now he felt that the desire to reclaim her was slowly ebbing away from him, and in its place was arising a powerful, and almost irresistible inclination to try his chances with the new charmer thrown by fate upon his path.

At the request of Mr. Norton, the fair musician sang, but she chose operatic music, and in the highly cultivated voice that filled the room, there was little to remind one of the fresh, clear tones to which her early adorer had once listened entranced.

Thorne at length drew near the piano, and asked if she ever sang ballads. Could she sing for him, "Bonnie Doon," or, "Nannie, wilt thou gang wi' me?"

Claire glanced up at him with a slightly startled expression, for the latest named song had many associations connected with it which were intimately blended with that past in which he had played so conspicuous a part. She saw nothing in his face to alarm her, and carelessly replied :

"They do not suit my style, and I rarely attempt to sing ballads now. Alice excels in Scotch music, and she will go through her repertoire if you ask her. Her voice is exactly suited to do justice to Burns' songs."

She arose as she spoke and beckoned Alice to her. She came rather reluctantly, for she anticipated the request about to be made, and rather shrank from singing after the performance which had just ended.

She uttered some faint objections, but Alice knew it was her duty to entertain their guests to the best of her ability, and she finally took the seat Claire had vacated. The latter drew forward a large book, and said :

"Mr. Norton will look out the music for you, *ma chere*, and I have no doubt that your simple songs will be more highly appreciated than my scientific squalls."

Having thus disposed of her too devoted cavalier, Claire approached the bride, and after talking gayly with the circle around her a few moments, effected her escape from the room.

The heat of the night oppressed her, and she took refuge in the portico, which was quite deserted. A bright moon was shining over sea and land, with a few gossamer clouds low down in the horizon, from which faint flashes of summer lightning came at intervals. The tide was coming in, and with it came the first stirring of the sea breeze, and the buoyant air fanned her hot temples, and allayed the quick throbbing in them, which had begun to be almost intolerable.

A comfortable chair stood in the recess beside the door, and she sank down in it with a weary sigh, fervently hoping that no other straggler would come out to break the calm silence of the night with the chatter

about nothings which usually form the staple of conversation when comparative strangers meet together in such reunions as the one from which she had just escaped. Mechanically Claire played with the ring she had that night placed upon her hand, unconscious of the nervous motion of her fingers, till the tiny links of gold that seemed to bind the enameled hearts together broke and hung loosely from them. She looked at it a moment, regretfully, and then muttered :

“It is ominous of the past and of the future. *Our* hearts can never be bound in any permanent union. Oh ! that false, false man ! If he *could* be true to any one creature—to any one purpose, I might trust him again ! But he will not. He never will !”

She bowed her head upon her hands, and remained buried in bitter reverie for many moments. When she looked up at the sound of an approaching step, she saw that the man of whom she was so hardly thinking was standing within a few feet of her.

Thorne courteously said :

“Pardon me, Madame L’Epine, I had no intention of intruding on the solitude you seem to prefer ; if you bid me do so, I will return at once to the parlor. I must say, however, that it has lost its only attraction for me since you deserted it. I have a great deal to say to you, if I apprehended rightly the hint you gave me last evening when we met on this spot.”

Claire felt as if a hand had suddenly clutched her heart, but she calmly replied :

“If you really wish information on a certain subject, I can give you much that may be of vital interest to you.”

“I certainly do wish to know all that you can tell

me. The night is very beautiful—we are liable to interruption here every moment, and if you will walk with me half an hour on the beach, I shall feel both honored and grateful.”

Claire hesitated a moment, but finally said:

“I will go in and get my mantilla, and rejoin you in a few moments.”

She came back after a brief absence, with shrouding folds of black lace wrapped over her head and face in such a way as to conceal her features as much as possible. From the glimpse he had of them, Thorne thought they were very pale, but that might be the effect of the moonlight, or the contrast between her complexion and the sombre cloud in which she had enveloped herself.

They went out in the still moonlight together—the long-severed husband and wife: he unconscious of the proximity of the being he had once so adoringly loved; she alternately repelled by, and attracted toward him.

It was near midnight, and at that hour there were no loiterers on the sands. Not a word was exchanged between them till they gained the smooth surf-beaten strand on which the sea was rolling up in waves crested with silvery foam. Claire could not have spoken even if she had not determined that Thorne should first do so, for she was trying to overcome the thrilling agitation she felt when he drew her arm beneath his own. The last time they had thus walked beneath the light of a summer moon, they were wedded lovers; and in *her* heart, at least, not one disloyal thought or feeling had then found a place.

With this attractive woman leaning on his arm, Thorne found it very difficult to commence his in-

quiries concerning that other one in whom he had lately felt an interest. He at length said :

“ I was surprised to learn from Mrs. Balfour that you are a member of the Courtnay family. Not nearly related to them, however, I believe? ”

“ My mother was a Miss Courtnay. I am as nearly related to them as Rosine Lapierre is,” she briefly replied.

“ And you know Rose—my Rosebud, as I used to call her. You met with her in Europe, and can tell me something of the brilliant career I am told she has run in Paris.”

“ If you really care to hear of her triumphs, I could prove to you, perhaps, that the gem you cast away only needed a rich setting to show all its worth and beauty ; but do you really wish to hear of your repudiated wife, Mr. Thorne? ”

“ I should care to listen to anything from your lips, Madame L'Epine, for you attract and charm me more than any one I have known for years. Till very lately, I had a strong wish to seek Rosine again, and prove to her how deeply I was sinned against when I was, in a manner, compelled to give her up. But I confess to you that, since I met with you, the desire to win my way again into her favor has ceased to be the ruling wish of my wayward heart. It is not right, I know, but it is my misfortune to be guided by impulse, and I would not offer a new wrong to my injured wife by asking her to accept my hand, if I could not give back to her the love I once felt for her.”

Claire suddenly withdrew the hand that rested upon his arm, and disdainfully said :

“ You are no longer a boy, but a man capable of

estimating the imperious nature of such a claim as Rosine has upon you. You are bound to her by every tie of honor; you should make up to her for all she has suffered through you, yet you are capable of being turned from the sacred path of duty by a penchant for one for whom you can feel but a passing interest. Rosine might have married brilliantly, but she refused all offers; and what should have led her to do that, but the hope of a future reunion with you?"

"Why should she have cherished such a delusion, when I was fettered hopelessly for so many years? Rosine has enjoyed them far more than I have. She, doubtless, cast from her heart all regrets, and made herself happy in the gay sphere to which her brother introduced her. If I asked her to give up her position as a queen of fashion, in all probability, she would refuse."

"No, she would not, if she believed that the old love had never died out in your heart. Convince her of that, and she will forgive all—*all*—and she has much to condone."

"True—so much, that I doubt the wisdom of seeking to renew our former relations. I do not know how to play the part of the penitent gracefully. I should find myself in a false position, and within the last twenty-four hours I have found a dozen arguments against our reunion, for every one I found in favor of it before that time."

"You have then ceased to love her?"

And the voice of Claire was low and troubled.

"Was it not my duty to do so when I claimed another woman as my wife? The love that has been buried for seventeen long years is not likely to flash

up into a sudden flame again. I was wretchedly unhappy in my last marriage, but I confess that it was as much my fault as that of Agnes. I bitterly resented the force that was used against me, but I yielded to it. Rosine will not be likely to forgive me for that, or consent to resume the position I lately thought of offering her, without making me feel too much humiliated by her acceptance of it?"

"And you think only of yourself, not of her—of her who has——"

She suddenly broke down, and Thorne looked earnestly at her, trying to gain a view of her face; but she held her mantilla too closely over it to allow him a glimpse of her agitated features.

After a pause, he said:

"I may be selfish, Madame—I fear that I am—but it is a fault shared with the most of my sex. Till lately, I thought a great deal of my Rosebud, and wished to do what was possible toward effecting a reconciliation between her and myself; but a new influence has come into my life, and I must blindly follow it, whether for good or for evil. *You*, at least, should pardon me, for you are responsible for this change in my plans."

"And you will not seek that forsaken one—you will not sue to her for forgiveness?" she almost passionately asked.

"Madame, in the present state of my feelings, I dare not. I am a man to love utterly, or not at all. A woman forced on my acceptance by a sense of duty would be as hateful to me as that one became to whom my father compelled me to give my hand. Rosine is happier in her freedom than I could *now* make her."

Claire stood silent a moment, and then in clear, resonant tones, said :

“Mr. Thorne, you have this night cast from you, a second time, the supreme blessings of life—true love and the happiness that springs from it. I shall speak no more of Rosine. Let her name be buried in the oblivion to which you have consigned her memory. Since the mission I voluntarily undertook has failed, let us return to the house—we have nothing more to say to each other.”

“On the contrary, I have a great deal to say to you, Madame, but in your present mood I will not damage my own cause by speaking more plainly. I will only say that, as you wear the ring which Mr. Balfour declared to be that of fate, I dare to hope that it may prove a mystic link between us, to be strengthened in time till a more perfect union than those which have formerly bound me is accomplished.”

Claire laughed aloud, but she shivered at the same time, and held up the hand on which she had placed the ring.

“See,” she said, “the chain that bound the hearts together is broken. Is not that ominous of what would be the result if I consented to listen to you?”

Thorne took the hand in his own, and, after a glance at the loosened chain, said :

“The rivet has only fallen out—that can easily be replaced. If you will allow me, I will take it away with me and have it repaired. I shall take care this time to have the chain so securely fastened that the twin hearts will be irrevocably bound to each other.”

“And in that condition, I suppose, you wish me to

accept them as a type of destiny?" she mockingly asked.

"Certainly, as manifest destiny," he replied, with a smile which many women had found irresistible.

"Oh, the vanity of man! Let us go in, Mr. Thorne. I came out with you to plead a cause, not to have love made to me by a man who should consider himself bound."

"Bound to what? A dead love and a fantastic notion of honor! Pardon me, Madame L'Epine, but I think you carry your ideas of my obligations to Rosine too far. She has made herself very happy while absent from me, and I cannot see that I am called on to sacrifice myself to her at this late day."

"Let us dismiss this subject, if you please," said Claire. "My friend is the last woman in the world to accept a sacrifice from you—certainly not so grave a one as giving up a passing fancy would be."

"Madame, you are severe."

"Only just, Mr. Thorne."

As they walked toward the house the conversation continued in the same strain, with little advantage on either side; but, when they reached the gate, Thorne asked:

"Shall I take the ring, Madame, and have the refractory links bound together in indissoluble union?"

Claire held up her hand with a coquettish gesture, and with a laugh, said:

"Yes, you may serve me that far, but do not imagine that those hearts of gold represent either yours or mine."

"I perceive that they have taken some impressions from the enameler's art, as yours and mine have from

the hand of fate, but the gold is beneath, Madame L'Epine. In mine, it is doubtless mingled with dross; but in yours, I believe it will be found pure."

"Do not trust to that. My nature has as much alloy as that of most others, but its worst trait is coquetry. If you madly choose to enter the lists, you may try your chances; but I warn you that I shall avenge the cause of the forsaken Rosine before I am done with you."

"I shall risk it at all events, Madame; and I hope to win such a place in your favor that you will have no desire to be done with me till the final end of all earthly love and hate is reached in—the grave."

"Do you really presume to say that you could be constant to any one—to anything?"

"I shall be to you, lady fair."

They reached the house in time to find the company dispersing, and soon afterward Claire found herself alone in her apartment. She surveyed her pale face in the mirror, and with starting tears, murmured:

"He has settled his own fate, and mine! Ah! how different it might have been, had I found truth and constancy in his reckless and volatile nature. I will win the place I have vowed to regain, and then——"

She shivered, and burst in tears.

CHAPTER XXX.

DESTINY AT WORK.

In the following week the party from Seaview went to Cape May. A few days after their arrival,

Thorne joined them as they were going down to dinner, and offered his arm to Claire, who accepted it with a coquettish smile.

The season was at its height, and a gay and brilliant crowd had assembled in search of pleasure more than of health. There were many beautiful women, but among them, Claire shone pre-eminent for her charms of person and manner, and also for the elegance of her toilette.

Even before the appearance on the scene of the one person she wished to fascinate and make wretched by her flirtations with others, she had been declared the queen of beauty by the men, and that of fashion by the women. The Parisian dresses, her laces, and jewels, were the admiration and despair of her feminine rivals, for in this country nothing so elegant could be obtained without the expenditure of a small fortune.

It was asserted that she was enormously rich, and that, of course added to the prestige. If it had been whispered to Walter Thorne that the woman who received all the homage laid at Claire's feet, with the air of one born to conquer, was the simple-hearted maid of the valley who had met with such treatment at his hands, he could not have been induced to believe it. Among all her adorers he was the most infatuated, the most earnest in pursuit, and the least considered.

Claire tantalized him, held him at arm's length, and made him so furiously jealous at times that he felt almost tempted to destroy both her and himself. Then she would suddenly devote herself to him, raise him to the seventh heaven of hope, only to dash him down again into the darkness of doubt, and despair.

Thorne was no match for her in the game they were

playing, for she was a skillful adept, and he but a tyre. She tortured him as she declared she would, but kept him to his allegiance by skillfully holding out the belief that she preferred him above all her other adorers, and after a sufficient probation, she might reward him with the hand he so eagerly solicited — of the heart that should have gone with it, she made no mention.

Mrs. Balfour watched her career with doubt and disapprobation, but Claire would listen to no remonstrance, and always declared that the end should be satisfactory to her friend. When Ada consulted with her husband as to what steps could be taken to bring her to have some care for her future happiness with the man she so adroitly tormented, he could only shake his head, and say :

“ We have no right to interfere ; they must settle their affairs in their own way, and in my opinion Thorne is only getting what he deserves. I never saw a man so madly in love, or so blind to the truth as he is. He has not a suspicion that he is desperately in love with his own wife ; for, if the command of God means anything, it is to be understood literally, and your friend actually stands in that relation to him.”

“ So she has always insisted. As a Catholic, Claire regards the marriage bond indissoluble, save by death. I only wish I dared to give him a hint of the true state of the case.”

“ It is too late for that now,” replied Mr. Balfour, gravely. “ You might do more mischief than good. It will be best not to meddle in any way with their affairs, Ada. Since we agreed to keep her secret, we are bound to do so to the end. You have enough to do to watch our Alice and Louise, without annoying

yourself about two people who are old enough to take care of themselves."

"True, but it seems to me that they are both sharpening weapons hereafter to be used against themselves. I take a deep interest in Claire, and in spite of Walter's faults, I think there is good in him, which the influence of a true affection would develop. If she would only see this, and become the Angel of Salvation to him, they might yet be as happy together as—as—you and I are."

Mr. Balfour lifted her hand to his lips, and said:

"Thank you for your last words, my dear; but you and I are very different from those passionate and impulsive creatures. What affords us quiet happiness, would be deadly monotony to them. I repeat, let them settle their affairs their own way, for neither you nor I can do anything to induce them to take the same view of life as we do."

Alice came in looking very bright and pretty in a fresh evening dress, ornamented with flowers. Louise followed her, in a plain white muslin and blue ribbons. She triumphantly said:

"See, mother, is not my sister's dress in perfect taste. We arranged the flowers ourselves, and I expect you and papa to say that it is beautiful."

"It is indeed charming," said her father, "and very becoming too, I must say. I am afraid my little Alice will be setting herself up for a belle among the juniors."

"There is no need to set herself up at all, when others have done it for her," said Louise half indignantly. "Alice is as much admired among the young set here, as Madame L'Epine is among the older peo-

ple. Our party has borne away the palm this season, at all events."

"Then you are pleased with your sister's success, *petite*?"

Louise flushed slightly.

"Of course I am; and it is ungenerous in you to refer to my former naughtiness. Mother has made me ashamed of cherishing so mean a passion as jealousy."

Mr. Balfour kissed her and said:

"Pardon me, my pet; I did not mean to wound you. I knew that the good seed was planted, but I did not know that it had so soon blossomed and borne fruit."

"Mamma is like a Japanese juggler. She produces miracles in the moral, as they do in the floral kingdom," said Louise, nestling down on the sofa beside Mrs. Balfour. "I cannot be lovely and fascinating as Madame L'Epine and Alice are, but I can be good and useful, as mother is, which will be better."

Mrs. Balfour passed her hand caressingly over her rippling hair, and smilingly said:

"Don't be too humble in your estimate of yourself, my dear. I intend you to be not only a true and noble woman but a very charming one too. Alice is tasting her first triumphs now, but your day will come, and I think it will be as bright as hers."

"Do you really think so, mamma? Alice is handsome, and I dark and plain."

"Dark as a gipsy, but not plain, for you have a bright and changeful face, which, to many, will be more interesting when illuminated by intelligence and good temper than a merely pretty one."

"So I must labor to make myself charming," said Louise, laughing gaily. "I promise to be a Goody

Twoshoes from to-day, and to make myself a regular bluestocking, that I may make sure of what you promise as the result."

"Mamma," said Alice, who had been surveying the effect of her toilette in a large cheval glass, "has Mr. Thorne consented yet that his daughter should join us? The season is almost over, and if she is to come at all, she should be with us this week."

"I cannot tell what his intentions are, Alice, I have spoken to him several times on the subject of his bringing May hither, but he has always evaded me. I do not believe he has any intention of hampering himself with a grown-up daughter. I shall not offer to chaperon her again."

"It will not be necessary after this summer, for Mr. Thorne will have a wife of his own to look after his daughter. Everybody says that he and Madame L'Epine will make a match, and I think it will be very nice for May to have her for a stepmother. Next to you, I should like her best for mine."

"Upon my word, you youngsters settle things in a most off-hand manner," said Mr. Balfour, laughing. "I suppose it is the united wisdom of the junior clique that has arranged a marriage to which the parties most deeply concerned have not yet consented."

Alice blushed, and deprecatingly replied:

"Dear papa, we cannot help observing what is patent to all. Mr. Thorne is perfectly devoted, and Madame L'Epine accepts his homage in such a way as to afford him encouragement, even when she seems bent on annoying him."

"Really, Alice, considering this is your first appearance on the stage, you seem to have progressed

wonderfully in the knowledge of womanly tactics. By what species of clairvoyance have you been able to comprehend those of Madame L'Epine?"

Alice blushed deeply, and after a moment's hesitation, said:

"If you won't laugh at me, papa, or scold me for watching her, I will tell you."

"I pledge myself to be as grave as a judge, and, as to scolding you, I think I should have to practice that before I should know how to begin."

"So you would, you dearest of fathers, so I will tell you what a little spy I have been. I am very fond of Madame L'Epine, as you know, and I like Mr. Thorne, too. I have been interested in speculating on his chances of success with her, for every body can see that he is devoted to her. She often treats him shamefully, but there is an expression in her eyes when she looks at him that is not there when she regards others; and when she has most deeply offended him, she lures him back in a way that plainly says, I prefer you to every other. I cannot explain to you how I understand this, but it is clear to me."

"Well, my dear, I think it a pity that you cannot exercise your talents as a detective where they would be of service," said Mrs. Balfour. "I hope you do not give your young friends the benefit of your wise observations. I think the object of your speculations would be offended if she suspected that she has been under such surveillance from you."

"Oh, mother, you know that I could never be guilty of such a breach of delicacy as that! I can speak freely to you and papa of what concerns our friend, but not to strangers."

"I ask your pardon, my love, for suggesting such a possibility ; but young people are so thoughtless that they often do what they afterward regret. I see that I judged you too harshly, and I am sorry for it."

"You have taught me what is right, mother, and I only try to guide myself by the standard you have given me," said Alice. "I have heard a great deal said about Madame L'Epine and her flirtations, but I have never added a comment of my own."

"That was right and sensible. But how do you propose to get May Thorne here through her influence ?"

"In a very straightforward manner. I shall ask her to use it with Mr. Thorne to induce him to allow her to join us."

"Well, success attend you, my child, for I wish to give that poor, neglected girl a chance to see something of society. My heart aches whenever I think of her shut up with servants in that lonely house."

"She has a governess now. I heard Mr. Thorne tell Madame L'Epine that he had found a suitable one to take charge of her. She was asking him when Miss Thorne was to come to Cape May, and he replied by saying that she would do better to remain at home under the charge of Mrs. Black."

Louise here started up, and exclaimed :

"Mrs. Black ! Why, that is the lady Madame S. discharged from her school the week after I entered it, because she was so dictatorial and meddling that she could not stand her. A nice time Miss Thorne will have with such a person as she is !"

"You saw her, then, Lou. ; what was she like ?"

"She wasn't like any other person I ever saw. She

is stiff as a poker, and yellow, and sharp, and hateful every way. She found fault with poor Fidèle, and told Madame S. that if every pupil was allowed to bring her dog with her, she had better organize a department for canine instruction at once. Madame told her that she was welcome to take charge of it; one word brought on another, and the end was, that Mrs. Black left in a rage."

"My dear Louise, are you sure that this lady is as disagreeable as you have described her?" asked Mrs. Balfour.

"I don't think I am exaggerating, mamma. I know that I should be perfectly miserable if I were shut up with Mrs. Black, and forced to obey all her commands."

Mr. Balfour and his wife exchanged glances; the latter arose and said:

"It is growing late; the ball-room will be crowded to-night, so we had better go in while there is a chance for me to obtain a pleasant seat. You must not dance later than twelve to-night, Alice. I wish you to enjoy yourself thoroughly, but to do that, you must not wear yourself out with the dissipations of this gay place."

"I will remember not to make engagements to last beyond that hour," was the reply; and they moved toward the portion of the house in which the ball-room was situated.

Dancing had not commenced, and Claire was promenading with Thorne, but with a suite of followers with whom she bandied sparkling repartees and gay badinage, that caused him to grind his teeth with rage, although her hand rested on his arm with that thrilling

pressure which said to him, "With others I jest; on you I lean." In his heart he believed that his jealousy was groundless, but he could not repress the anger with which he saw her lavish her smiles on other lovers as eager to win her as he was himself.

Claire glanced up at his stormy face, and read what was passing in his mind. She continued her pastime a little longer, and then atoned to him by refusing to waltz with every one that asked her, saying, with her sweetest smile :

"I shall waltz but once to-night, and I have promised that to Mr. Thorne. Excuse me, gentlemen, but the weather is too warm to render a crowded ball-room the most agreeable place to spend half the night in. After this one dance is over, I shall seek a cooler atmosphere."

"Shall I have the honor of escorting you, Madame?" asked Mr. Norton, who had followed her to Cape May, and made one of her train of adorers.

"Thank you, but my escort is already provided;" and she glanced smilingly into the lowering face that loomed above her. The clouds disappeared from it like magic, and Thorne threw a triumphant glance around upon his rivals. For days he had vainly prayed for a private interview with her, and now she accorded it in this public manner, as if to assure him and others that he was the favored lover, who had only to ask his reward and obtain it.

His heart beat high with triumphant happiness as he whirled around the large room, holding in his arms the creature he coveted beyond all earthly gifts. The sudden softness of her manner filled him with such intoxicating joy as can only be felt and appreciated by one

who has doubted and suffered as Thorne had. His passion for this enchantress had assumed that phase which leads men to commit any extravagance for the sake of the desired object. To refuse him now, or to play with him longer, would have been dangerous to his sanity, perhaps to her own life; for Claire knew him to be infatuated to that point that he would die with her sooner than consent to live without her.

When the waltz was over, she sat down a few moments near an open window, and Alice came up to her and whispered:

"Please ask Mr. Thorne to bring his daughter here this week. You know he can refuse you nothing, and I have set my heart on having her with us."

"She shall come," replied Claire, with one of her radiant smiles. "I too wish to make her acquaintance."

Alice looked intelligent, thanked her with animation, and flitted away to join the partner she had forsaken for a moment.

Claire suddenly arose, and said

"Let us go out on the piazza. If I linger here much longer, I shall be surrounded by a wearisome crowd of idle flatterers; I am beginning to tire of this frivolous round of nothings, and I sometimes wish that I could aspire to a higher rôle than that of a successful belle."

"You may sustain that of an idolized wife if you choose to make the exchange," was the whispered reply, as she took the arm he offered, and swept from the room.

"The piazza was nearly deserted, and the two walked to the extreme end and sat down where they

had a view of the ocean, with a young moon shining over it.

Claire leaned her head upon her hand, and was so long silent, that Thorne at length asked :

“Have you no reply to give to me, Madame L’Epine? I explicitly asked you to be my wife, and I must have a direct answer to-night. I can no longer endure the uncertainty in which I have lately lived.”

She turned her eyes upon him, and dreamily said :

“I know you cannot. I have read all the phases of your feelings for me, and I believe that among all those who offer me homage, yours is most sincere. Yet I shall not render you happy, Mr. Thorne—I know I shall not.”

“I will trust to that! May I infer from your last words that I am so blessed as to have won your consent to become my very own—the angel of my life?”

“Or the demon,” she said, with a short, bitter laugh. “Remember, you take me for better, for worse; but as you are so very ardent a wooer, I will keep you no longer in suspense. From to-night my flirtations are ended; for as plighted bride I shall not encourage the attentions of others. You have conquered; and I submit to the power I can no longer defy.”

He took the hand she held out to him and uttered all the rhapsodies of a lover over it. For a few moments Claire forgot the wrong, the bitterness that lay between them; she only heard his words of love, and knew that they were sincere. If he had not loved her as his life in those by-gone days he certainly did so now, and the triumph of having won him anew was overshadowed by the flood of sweet and tender emotions that gushed up in her heart.

The impulse came upon her to tell him all ; to avow the deception she had practised upon him, and entreat his forgiveness, but as she unclosed her tremulous lips to do so, he unfortunately said :

“ You are my first true love, my darling. My hand has twice been given in marriage, but this is the only masterful passion my heart has known. In my youth I wooed and won a lovely child, but, as you know, we were wrenched apart by the mandate of my father. It is a painful and humiliating story ; but we were both better off apart, perhaps, than if we had braved the poverty that lay before us, if we had clung to each other.”

“ Did Rosine take that view of your separation ? ” asked Claire, in a faint tone.

“ I cannot say. She suffered then, and so did I ; but she consoled herself by seeking other scenes, and finding friends who enabled her to play a brilliant part in the gayest capital in the world. I had nothing left but to accept the destiny offered me by my father, as the sole alternative to regain his favor. The woman who bore my name was endured—never loved—never appreciated as she, perhaps, deserved. I was a bad husband to her, but to you I shall give all that was denied to her—love, confidence, and happiness—I trust, and believe.”

She withdrew her hand and quietly said :

“ I hope that you do not share the delusion of others with regard to my reputed fortune. I am not rich ; I have a few thousands a year secured to me in such a way that they cannot be alienated.”

Thorne sincerely replied :

“ I have never thought of your possessions. It is

yourself I covet, not the fortune with which rumor may have endowed you. If you were penniless, I would as gladly take you to my heart as the one priceless gem this world holds for me. You cannot doubt my truth after the evidences of devotion I have given you."

"No, I do not doubt it. I know that you love me."

"And you, Madame, you give me in return such affection as is due from the wife to the husband she accepts?"

She looked up at him and reproachfully asked:

"Why do you imply a doubt of that? Have I not consented to marry you?"

"Pardon me, but something in your manner casts a sudden chill over me. The doubt was born of my overwhelming passion for you. Where so much is given, the heart becomes exacting; yet I can scarcely expect from you the same devotion I lavish on you. It is strange that I do not yet know your name. Ada always speaks of you to me as Madame L'Epine. As it is now my privilege to address you less formally when we are alone, I wish to know it from yourself."

"My name is Clara," she briefly replied.

Thorne started slightly, and his thoughts went back to other days—but they swiftly returned—he had no room in his heart for early memories to-night; he could only think of the adorable being beside him. He softly said:

"Having your consent to be mine, Clara, let us settle the time for our union. There is no need of delay, and the earliest day you will consent to name will suit me best."

Claire quietly replied:

“In three more weeks we leave this place, and we can be married in the cathedral as we pass through Philadelphia. You are aware that I am a Catholic, and of course I must be wedded with all the ceremonies of my own church. But I have a request to make of you first.”

“It is granted before it is asked. I can refuse nothing to her who has rendered me so supremely happy.”

“Thank you—I wish your daughter to come hither that I may make her acquaintance, and in a measure reconcile her to so speedy a marriage on your part. It is scarcely six months since the death of her mother, remember, and May must feel a little wounded when she hears of our approaching union.”

Thorne hesitated a moment, and then said :

“I have promised and I will not retract. My daughter shall come hither at once, and I am sure she will be charmed with you, as all are that approach you. May knows better than any one else what a desert waste my home was to me in the years passed under the same roof with her mother. Agnes and myself were utterly estranged from each other, whether through her fault or my own it is useless now to inquire. We were both, doubtless, greatly to blame ; but for May the changes about to be made at Thornhill will be an advantage. She will be happier and better cared for under your reign than, I am afraid, she has been under mine.”

Claire shivered slightly, and rising said :

“Since we have settled all that is necessary, I believe I will retire. On the twentieth of September, I will ratify the promise I have given you to-night—and

before this week is ended, I shall hope to see Miss Thorne here."

"It shall be as you wish, but why do you leave me so early? I am only beginning to realize my great good fortune. It is difficult for me to believe that my late doubts have been dissipated by the blissful certainty that you will be mine. Remain a little longer, I entreat, and let us talk over the future that is opening before us."

With a light laugh, in which there was a ring of bitterness, she said :

"There is often more pleasure in anticipation than in realization, so I will leave you to your dreams. I am a most capricious person, and to-night I must be alone. Since I came hither my life has been such a whirl that I have had no time for thought. Is it not natural that after settling so important a question as my future fate, I should wish to reflect soberly on what I have done."

"I hope that reflection will not lead to repentance," Thorne said, with a slight inflexion of anxiety in his voice, for he knew that a coquette is the most uncertain of mortals ; and although Claire had consented to marry him, he would not feel quite certain of her till the irrevocable knot was tied.

With a glance that reassured him, she replied :

"The tie that exists between us is too strong to be broken. Have no fears for my stability, for in spite of every misgiving I may have, I will give you my hand on the day named. I give you leave to proclaim our engagement, and thus free me from the attentions that have, of late, become almost oppressive to me."

He raised her hand to his lips, and rapturously said :

That is assurance enough. I should be a wretch to harbor another doubt. For my sake you relinquish the homage due to such charms as yours, and I can never be too grateful. I acknowledge that I am jealous by nature, and I could scarcely bear to see you now listening with complacency to the flatteries of the butterflies that have fluttered around you, and given you the opportunity to torment me as you have done."

"I warned you beforehand that I am a coquette ; but from to-night I abdicate my throne and sceptre, and dedicate my life to a purpose."

"And that purpose is to make me the happiest and most enviable of men."

"Wait and see."

And she laughed so strangely that he earnestly regarded her.

Claire withdrew her hand from his clasp and went on :

"I am getting terribly nervous—pray take me to my room, and then return to the revellers."

Thorne saw that she was trembling as if with a chill, and he moved forward without any further attempt to detain her. When they gained the corridor on which her room opened, it was silent and empty. He suddenly clasped her in his arms and kissed her on brow and lips without any resistance on her part. For a moment her head rested helplessly upon his breast, and then she faintly said :

"Let me go now—good-night!"

And, abruptly extricating herself from his arms, she entered her room, closed and bolted the door, and threw herself upon her bed in a paroxysm of emotion born of the contending feelings that struggled in her heart.

Thorne moved away as if walking on air. His face was radiant, and when he re-entered the ball-room the aspirants for the favor of the reigning belle knew that he was their successful rival, even without being told. He sought out Mrs. Balfour, and sitting beside her, said :

“ As my oldest friend, Ada, I ask your congratulations. Your friend has accepted me, and within a month we shall be united. After all my trials and shortcomings, my fate promises to be a happier one than I deserve.”

Mrs. Balfour started, and changed color, but she calmly said :

“ I give you my most earnest wishes for peace and happiness. But are you sure that you will find them in a union with Madame L'Epine, Walter?”

“ Why not? I love her as I never thought to love any woman again. When I lately sought you, I dreamed only of atonement to my unfortunate Rosine, but Clara has made me forget everything but her adorable self. I declare to you that I think she has no peer among women.”

“ Yet it might have been better for you had you remained true to your first love. Has Clara told you nothing of—of her past life?”

“ I asked to know nothing but that I adore her beyond expression, and she deigns to return my affection. Crowned with her love, am I not as a king among men? Is there anything beyond that that I should wish to know?”

“ As you intend to marry her, I thought you might wish to learn something more of her past life. Have you no curiosity to know something of the man to whom she was united?”

"No ; I never wish to hear him alluded to in any way. I hope she was not happy with him, for I cannot bear that she shall cast one regretful thought to him, even if he is in his grave."

"She was not happy with him, I can assure you of that much, and she has little cause to remember him with tenderness. If you can efface from her heart the memory of her wretched past, my wishes for your happiness will not be vain."

"I will efface it—from me she shall know nothing but tenderness and care. Oh, Ada, I feel like a new man, and I intend to try and be a better one."

"Ah ! Walter, you have made many such resolutions only to break them. But I hope that good to you both will spring from this new union."

"I believe it will. I am sure it will. And now I have a favor to ask of you. I have promised to bring May hither, that my betrothed may make her acquaintance. Will you pardon me for not before accepting your offer to take charge of her, and receive her into your daughters' room when she arrives ?"

"Few things would afford me more pleasure. The girls occupy a large and pleasant chamber, and they are most anxious to claim May for a companion. Bring her to us as soon as possible, and I will do all that is possible to make the change an agreeable one for her."

"There can be little doubt as to that, for Thornhill is a dreary place, and I begin to think that I should not have left May so long shut up there. But in spite of my precautions, she has actually found a lover, for a petition was made to me not very long since by a young lawyer from Philadelphia for my consent to their marriage. Of course I refused, for he had clandes-

tinely made her acquaintance, and he confessed to me that he had little besides his professional emoluments, which are small. I found a governess and sent her to Thornhill, with strict orders to watch her pupil unremittingly."

Mrs. Balfour listened with interest.

"What is the name of this young lover? Since he was honorable enough to come to you in place of eloping with your daughter, I think his claims merit some consideration."

"I do not agree with you. It does not suit my plans to allow May to marry a poor man. If she would have acceded to the terms I offered her, I would have brought her here long ago, but she was obstinate, and so was I."

"Are you willing to enlighten me as to why she refused?"

"If I do so, I must also tell you the ground of our disagreement, and that I prefer not doing."

She gave him a penetrating glance, but Mr. Balfour approached them at that moment with his two daughters, and Alice gayly said:

"See how obedient I am, mamma. Though I am not at all tired, I have refused half a dozen invitations to dance, and here I am, punctual to the hour you named for retiring."

"And I will reward you by announcing to you that May will be here in a few days to join our party."

"I am so glad! Thank you, Mr. Thorne, for consenting to bring her. She is mamma's cousin, you know, and we have the right to take an interest in her."

"I am sure I am very grateful that you should do

so. I think that you and May will be pleasant companions for each other. I am sorry I did not bring her before, but I had good reasons for not doing so."

"All is well that ends well," said Mrs. Balfour, rising to leave the room. "Only bring her now as soon as possible, and assure her of a welcome reception from your friends."

They bade him good-night, and Thorne strolled out on the piazza, and sought the same spot on which he had sat with Claire. There, dreaming and smoking, he remained several hours.

The increasing chilliness of the night air at length drove him to his room; and on the table he found a strange-looking missive, awkwardly folded, and addressed to "Mister Walter Thorn, Esq.," in a sprawling hand. Wondering who his correspondent could be, he took the letter up, and saw that the postmark was L——.

Hastily tearing it open, he found within an almost illegible scrawl which was with some difficulty deciphered:

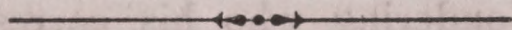
THONHEL, Orgst 25.

hon'd sur I kant rite a coz o roomtiz, an I sens this by manes o' the boy barny—that critter yer sent here aint no kount to luk arter Miss ma. Ef yer don kom bac as quic es yer kin she'll be of wi' her lovyer, coz its al fixt fur hur to lope by the last o' the week; thusday nite is the time; i'm flat o my bac an kant do nuthin, so ef yer wants to keep yer darter you'd better lose no time. Yours in deflection, C. BENSON.

After spelling this out Thorne sat for many moments reflecting on what was best to be done. He was half

tempted to leave May to the fate she had chosen, for he was most unwilling to be separated, even for a day, from the woman who had so deeply infatuated him. But he remembered how important the control of his daughter's fortune might be to him, and with a smothered curse he drew paper toward him and wrote a few lines to Claire, informing her that his presence was imperatively needed at Thornhill, but he would return in five days at farthest, accompanied by his daughter.

By this time it was three o'clock ; he had no time to rest, as he must catch the train at four, so he thrust a few necessary articles in a traveling bag, and an hour later was whirling along on his way to Thornhill.



CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ELOPEMENT PREVENTED.

THORNE left the train at a small town twenty miles from L—. It was five o'clock, and half an hour later the carriage he ordered was ready to take him on to his destination. He began to have many doubts as to arriving in time to prevent the intended elopement, for the horses furnished him seemed incapable of traveling more than five miles an hour.

He could only console himself with the hope that the lovers would have no opportunity of leaving before ten o'clock, and if no accident happened he might yet be in time to intercept their flight. He was anxious to do so, yet throughout the day he had thought less of

May and her intended escapade than of his own happiness. Insensibly all bitter and hard feeling merged in the tide of sweet hopes that filled his heart when the image of Claire arose before his fancy, and he felt more kindly even toward his offending daughter for the softening influence she had brought into his arid life.

Darkness gathered around him; the storm of the past day rendered the road heavy, and the tired horses struggled along, stumbling at nearly every step. At length the lights of L—— came in sight, and on looking at his watch the impatient traveler found that it was not yet ten. This was the night fixed on for the elopement and he might yet be in time, as he had but another mile to travel; he spoke to the driver:

“If you can make the distance between here and Thornhill in ten minutes, I will give you a dollar extra.”

“The critters is dead beat; they couldn’t do it ef you offered me fifty dollars. Ef you’re in a hurry you’d better git out and see ef a hoss can’t be had here.”

“So I will—for I believe you are right as to the condition of your horses. Here is your money, with enough added to it to pay your bill here, since you cannot go on to Thornhill.”

He gave the man a note, sprang out when he drew up in front of the hotel, and looked eagerly around him. A cabriolet in charge of a small boy was standing near the private entrance, which he at once recognized as that of Dr. Brandon. Without a moment’s hesitation Thorne sprang into it and said to the lad:

“Run in and tell the doctor I have taken his carriage away for half an hour. You know me, Ben—

Mr. Thorne. Say to him that I will send it back immediately."

With staring eyes the boy remonstrated:

"But yer carn't do it, Mr. Thorne, for the gemplin is a goin' to use it. 'Twarn't the doctor what brung it here, but Mr. Sinkler; he jest went in a minnit, and I were to hold the hoss for him."

"Ah, indeed! so much the better. Give my compliments to the young man when he comes out, and say to him that he will have no use for a carriage to-night."

He gave a sharp stroke to the horse and dashed off just as Sinclair reached the door. As the doctor's cab standing at the gate of Thornhill would attract little notice, it had been arranged that it should be used to bring May in town, and at Doctor Brandon's house the lovers were to take possession of the carriage provided for their intended journey.

The message delivered by the frightened Ben assured Sinclair that for the present all hope of success in their enterprise was over, and he hurried to Dr. Brandon to inform him of what had occurred.

Thorne dashed on toward his long-deserted home almost in good humor at the sudden checkmate he had given the plotters. May was safe for the present, at all events, and he had time before him in which to bring her back to her allegiance to himself.

When he reached the gate opening into the grounds of Thornhill it was quickly unclosed by a woman who had been on the watch. The night was too cloudy to enable him to distinguish her person under the shadow of the hedge, but Thorne recognized the voice of Nancy Bean as she said:

"It's all right, Mr. Sinkler—the dragon's sleepin' as ef she'll find it hard to wake up agin; an' here's Miss May's carpet sack. You jest go on arter her, an' I'll take care o' the kerridge."

"You are very accommodating, upon my word, Nancy," replied a voice that seemed to freeze her into stone. "Give me the satchel, and do you drive Dr. Brandon's cab back to town and tell him *I* returned it to him with my thanks for its use. As to yourself, I think it will be best for you not to show your face at Thornhill again."

He was very calm, for he could afford to be so in the moment of victory. Miss Bean handed him the satchel mechanically, and Thorne strode up the avenue without another word.

He was scarcely beyond hearing, when a mocking voice close at Nancy's elbow said:

"Somebody's sarved out now, I swon. I tould you I'd be aven wi' ye, an' be jabers I've kep' me word, Miss Bane. Carrots an' vict'ry forever!"

Nancy made a dive at his shaggy locks, caught him by them, and holding him down in spite of his struggles to escape, gave him a sound whipping, the horse, like the well-trained hack he was, standing by in grave contemplation of the proceeding.

When she had punished him to her own satisfaction, Nancy grimly mounted into the carriage, and as she drove off said:

"If that don't teach you not to meddle with what don't consarn you, I'll git Mr. Sinkler and Dr. Brandon to give you as much more."

"Ow! ow! Miss Bane, we're square up—you needn't git nobody as security for your debt, fur you've tuck it out'n my poor bones."

Barney moved off, suppressing the howls that arose to his lips through the dread he had of the master of the place, and hastened to report Thorne's arrival to the housekeeper.

In the meantime that gentleman made his way to the window through which he correctly supposed May would attempt to make her escape, and entered the room in the manner described in a previous chapter.

Casting a rapid glance around, he lifted May from the floor, and carried her into her chamber, in which a light was burning; he placed her on the bed and sprinkled water over her white face. He saw how much it had changed, and a faint feeling of remorse came to his heart for all he had made her suffer in those long months of loneliness, followed by the advent of a tyrannical task mistress who had neither feeling nor consideration for her helpless charge.

But his long repressed anger surged up again when May unclosed her eyes and regarded him with a stare of frightened bewilderment. With a sardonic curl of his lip he brusquely said :

"You are a pretty daughter to swoon at my feet when I come upon you after so long an absence. What have you been doing to make you so much afraid of me? for I see that you are trembling with apprehension."

"Oh, papa," she faintly gasped, "do not speak to me so! do not reproach me, for after all I have lately gone through, I cannot bear it."

"Ah, indeed! I thought your late experiences had been all *couleur de rose*. In spite of my efforts to shield you from such a fate, you have clandestinely made the acquaintance of a fortune-seeker, and if I

had not arrived as opportunely as I did, by this time you would have been disgraced by eloping from your father's house with a man you scarcely know."

May looked up at him with a face of stony whiteness, and slowly said :

"The life I lead beneath this roof is unendurable to me ; is it wonderful then that I should have sought to escape from it at any risk ? though you greatly wrong Harry Sinclair by imputing to him such motives. He is honorable and disinterested, as time will prove. I would have gone with him to-night—I do not deny it, for with him I should at least find the love and appreciation that died for me in this house when my mother passed from it. Oh, papa ! have you no pity for me ! no feeling of compassion for your motherless child."

Thorne angrily replied :

"Pity ! compassion for an ingrate who has defied my wishes as you have ! Love ! appreciation ! stuff ! sentimental nonsense ! You are your mother's own child, thwarting me at every turn and opposing your will to mine. On one condition you may go to the d—l your own way, and I will do nothing to prevent it. Surrender to me the money left you by your mother, and then see if this paragon of a lover will accept you. I may soon have pressing need of a large sum, and you may purchase your freedom by giving it to me. You can sell out your bank stock, as it is left absolutely to you to do as you please with, reserving for yourself three thousand dollars, as I do not wish you to be utterly impoverished."

For a few moments this avenue of escape seemed like a glimpse of Heaven to the unhappy girl, but the new-sprung hope died in its birth, for she remembered

the promise her dying mother had exacted from her, and she faintly replied :

“I would gladly do as you wish, sir, but I dare not break the pledge I gave to my mother. She may have been wrong in asking it of me, but she thought she was acting for the best.”

“No doubt—for her *best* actions were always opposed to *my* interests.”

He sat down beside the bed, and May did not venture to reply to him in his excited state. After another pause of considerable length, he went on :

“I have decided to make a change here which will be for your benefit as well as for my own happiness. You may think it very soon for me to think of marrying again, but knowing what you do, you cannot be very much surprised. I come hither to put a stop to what has been going on, and I take you with me to Cape May that you may make the acquaintance of the lady who will soon become my wife. You will find your cousin Ada ready to take charge of you. She has recently married Mr. Balfour, to whom she was engaged twenty-five years ago. To your grandfather they owed their long separation, for he marred her life as he did mine.”

“It was Mr. Balfour’s daughters that my cousin Ada took under her care,” said May, timidly. “I am glad to hear that she has become their stepmother, for she is a good woman. I—I—am not as much surprised at what you tell me about yourself as you might suppose. Dr. Brandon prepared me for the news some time ago. I hope you will be happier, papa, than you were with poor mamma.”

“If I am not it will be my own fault, for Madame

L'Epine is an angel of beauty and sweetness. I love *her* and I will endeavor to render her happy. We shall leave this place to-morrow morning at six o'clock, so you may pack up your things and be ready at that hour. My betrothed will soon win your affection and confidence, and if you choose, you can place yourself on a better footing with me than you have ever held. I will inquire about this young Sinclair, and if he is a proper match for you, I will not withhold my consent to your marriage, provided you will promise to aid me, if I should need your help."

"Dear papa, you know I will do all that is possible," was the grateful reply, and May arose from her reclining position and stood before him with a faint hue of returning color fluttering on her cheeks.

He interpreted her wistful glance, and bending down, impressed upon her brow the first caress she ever remembered receiving from him. Seeing that tears were springing to her eyes, he curtly said :

"That is the seal of reconciliation; and now tell me how you have fared with Mrs. Black, and how is it that she sleeps on the sofa in your sitting room at this hour of the night?"

May flushed, but she spoke the truth—

"I do not like Mrs. Black, and I am afraid I have been a great torment to her; but she treated me badly from the first. She drinks wine for her supper, and that she took last night was drugged to enable me to elude her vigilance."

The father laughed aloud :

"So the sheep-dog was muzzled, or rather fuddled with strong drink—A pretty story that to get out about a woman whose living is dependent on her per-

fect respectability. That gives me good cause for discharging her, and I shall do so in a very summary manner. I will write a few lines, and inclose in them her quarter's salary. Good-night! Get ready to leave Thornhill, and then try to sleep, for you have a long journey before you."

Thorne left the room, and after a contemptuous glance at the sleeping governess, he unlocked the door of the parlor and went out, taking with him the lamp that had been left upon the table. He stalked forward till he came to the apartment occupied by Mrs. Benson; pausing, he struck an imperious knock upon the door, which was replied to by the voice of the housekeeper:

"Come in, sir: I am in a state of debilitude, but you will egscuze that under the sarkimstances. Stand to one side Barney, an' let Mr. Thorne say what he's got to say to the humble detainer what has saved his darter from sich a disgraceful thing as runnin' away from him would be."

Thorne paused in the doorway, and curtly said:

"You did very right, Mrs. Benson, to warn me of what was going on, and I thank you very sincerely. I only stopped to ask how your rheumatism is, and to see if no one was with you who could transmit my orders to the carriage driver. This boy can go at once to Sam, and tell him to have the carriage at the door by six o'clock in the morning. I am going to take my daughter away with me and keep her under my own eye."

"That'll be best, sir, for I can't do nothin', and that Miss Black ain't worth shucks. In place of 'tendin' to her booktionary doin's, she's galvantin round

a-givin of orders to the people an' a-talkin' of siles an' skientific farmin' till they's all in sich a fluster that ef she'd stayed much longer there wouldn't ha' bin nobody else left on the place. In course, sir, yer'll take her along of yer?"

"I am sorry that it will be impossible for me to do so. I shall discharge her as I have no further use for her services, and pay her something extra for so unceremoniously ridding myself of her. I shall leave Thornhill with May before Mrs. Black is awake in the morning, and you must explain to her all that is necessary. With your command of language, you will not find that a difficult matter."

The housekeeper bridled, and self-complacently replied:

"Thank yer for sayin' that, Mr. Thorne. I *can* hold my own agin most people in the talkin' line, an' I hain't no dejection to breakin' a spear wi' Miss Black. She's a orfle hifalutin critter, but I think I knows how to despoze my words in as expressionable a way as she kin."

"No doubt of it, Mrs. Benson; but I hope you will be as respectful as possible to a lady who has stood in the position of teacher to Miss Thorne. I wish Mrs. Black to be treated with every consideration as long as she stays here."

"Very well, sir; if she don't give me more o' her sass I'll be as perlite as a dancin-master; but ef she goes to fling in her big words at me, I'll talk back and gin her as good as she sen's. There's Barney, sir, ready to do whatever you tells him, an' he's faithful to me I insure you."

"I suppose he wrote the letter you sent me?"

"Yes, sir; an' a miserable scrowged lookin' thing it was; but my hand was in sich a state of disbilitude that I couldn't do nothin' myself, so Barney writ what I told him. He's a good enough boy, but he's always worritin me 'bout the piece o' goold I promised him for watchin Miss May."

Understanding the hint, Thorne produced his purse, and taking from it a half eagle, offered it to Barney, saying:

"Since the debt was incurred on my account, allow me to pay it, Mrs. Benson. The letter was worth much more than this to me. Now, boy, be off with you, and if the carriage isn't ready to the moment, you will find that I can give kicks as well as gold pieces."

Barney grasped the money and vanished.

As Thorne drew to the door of the housekeeper's room, he said:

"Good-night and good-bye, Mrs. Benson! I shall not see you in the morning before I leave. I suppose I shall find everything in order in my own apartment."

"I hope so, sir, but I can't say, for I can't 'ten' to nothin' in my present state of discompozement. I kin only hope that Miss Black aint bin a-rummagin and turnin' things roun' there too as she has in all the rest o' the house."

"If you have kept the duplicate key yourself as you were bidden to do, she could not intrude into my sanctum. If she *has* been in there, I will turn both of you off, bag and baggage," he said, in his sternest tone.

"Oh, my, sir! you give me such a turn speakin' in that flustratin way. I kin jes begin to creep roun' myself, but I went in and 'tended to things to-day, an' you'll find the rooms all ready for you, for I 'spected

you wouldn't be long a-comin' arter you got that letter."

The door was closed, and Thorne moved towards his own apartments. By this time it was past midnight; but weary as he began to feel, he drew paper toward him, and wrote a polite note of dismissal to Mrs. Black in which he enclosed something more than her quarter's salary. He added a postscript in which he said:

"Excuse me for not waiting till you awoke, but as the slumbers of a lady who has drank a quantity of wine may last an indefinite time, I thought it best to remove my daughter before they ended. Last night I prevented an elopement, but if you will be prudent about mentioning that, I will be equally reticent as to the helpless condition in which I found you when I came to Thornhill. W. T.

"That insinuation will bridle her tongue," he muttered, "and she need not know that the wine had been drugged."

Ten minutes later he was sleeping soundly himself, oblivious of all that was passing on the other side of the house.

When Nancy reached Dr. Brandon's, she found Sinclair there, and soon told her story. The young lover was very anxious on May's account and insisted on driving back to Thornhill accompanied by the girl, who could be sent forward to reconnoitre while he lingered near the house till she returned to him with her report.

The two got out at the gate, and Sinclair stood

beneath the shadow of a tree within sight of the open window through which Thorne had entered, while Nancy crept toward those of her young lady's room. A few moments later the lamp was taken from the table, and the figure of a man passed from the apartment which Sinclair had no difficulty in identifying as that of the master of the house.

He waited a few moments, and finding that Thorne did not return, he ventured to draw near the window and call softly on the name of May. She came swiftly from the inner room, and in a moment was beside him.

In an apprehensive tone, she said :

"Oh, Harry, you must not remain here, nor can I go with you to-night. My father has been far less angry than I believed possible ; and after what has passed between us, I feel bound in honor not to leave my home, even with you."

"My dear May, if Mr. Thorne will be reasonable—if he holds out the slightest hope that he will consent to our marriage, I will not ask you to elope with me, for you know that we reluctantly chose that as our only resource. What has he said and to what have you pledged yourself ?"

"He has promised to inquire about you, and if he finds you a suitable person for me to marry, he declares that he will no longer object if I will sacrifice a portion of my fortune to extricate him from some difficulties he apprehends. I cannot tell yet what I shall do, but I have promised him that I will not defy him so far as to give you my hand without his knowledge."

"He is welcome to make any inquiry he pleases, and so far as I am concerned all will be found right. As to your money, May, do with it as you please—pur-

chase his consent to our union with it, if that is what he wants. If life and health are granted me, I can more than replace it in a few years. When your mother gave you such stringent commands concerning your fortune, she feared that you might have nothing else to rely on in the future; but now you have my love—my energy to sustain you, and you need fear nothing for the life that lies before you. It shall be my care to render the path you walk on smooth and happy.”

“I know it, Harry, and I am ready to make any sacrifice that is possible to enable me to place my hand in yours and commence the pilgrimage of love and duty that lies before us. Let us have faith in each other, and all will end well for us. Papa seems changed from what he was—he is softened by the new attachment he has formed, and he came hither to take me to Cape May, that I may meet my future step-mother. My cousin, Mrs. Balfour, is there, and she will take charge of me. Dr. Brandon will tell you that with Ada Digby I shall be quite safe and as happy as is possible for me when separated from you. He knows what a noble and true woman she is.”

Sinclair sighed lightly, but he cheerfully said :

“It is better to wait, and see what patience can accomplish, than to rush into a union which might forever estrange your father from you. There are very few who are justified in making a runaway match; until to-night I thought ours an exceptional case, but in this new phase of affairs we should violate our own sense of right if we attempted to carry out our design. I came hither, because I dreaded the violence of your father towards you, but I am so grateful for the

promise Mr. Thorne has made you, that I am willing to give you up to him a little while."

"Oh, Harry! if you and papa had met to-night, I tremble to think what the consequences might have been."

"It was best, perhaps, that we did not; but you need have feared no violence on my part, May—*your* father would have been sacred to me under any circumstances. Imagine my feelings, if you can, when I came out from the hotel, where I had been making the final arrangements about the carriage that was to take us into another State, and heard the message left by Mr. Thorne for me. I must see him before he goes away, and refer him to those who know me, and will vouch for the truth of all I have heretofore stated to him."

"An interview will be impossible before we leave, for I am to be ready at six o'clock, and papa seldom rises before that time. He is never in a good humor in the morning, and you had better follow us to Cape May, where you can meet him on neutral ground. Give me time to make a friend of Cousin Ada, for I rely on her to help us to secure papa's consent to give me to you."

Sinclair reflected a moment, and then said:

"You are a wise little counsellor, May, and I will take your advice. I will give your father time to get over his natural irritation at the effort I made to take you from him, and then seek him. You will see me at Cape May within a week, and soon afterward I hope that all will be settled to our satisfaction."

"I am sure it will, and now I must bid you good night. I have a great deal to do before I sleep, if, indeed, I can sleep at all after the excitement I have passed through."

“Good night, and good-bye, dearest love; not long shall the light of your sweet presence be wanting in the home which is waiting for its mistress. If your father cannot be reasonably propitiated, I will claim my treasure in defiance of him, and find means to secure it, too.”

May's head rested a moment on his breast, and their lips met. She then withdrew herself from his arms, and retreated from the window. The next moment Nancy Bean bounded through it, and said:

“Here I am, Miss May, come to help you put up your things. I rode out with Mr. Sinkler, but I jest told him that I wasn't goin' back to-night. The dragon's asleep, and in the mornin' I can keep out'n Mr. Thorne's way.”

“I am very glad that you are here, Nancy; you can assist me materially, and after I am gone, you can return to L——, and make your preparations to go to Philadelphia, to take charge of my future home till I come to reign over it myself.”

“Will yer pa ever let yer do that, Miss May?”

“I hope so. Let us pack my clothes now; I feel worn out with all I have gone through in the last few hours, and I shall gladly rest, even if I cannot sleep.”

“Yer jest lay out the things yer want to take, an' I'll put 'em in the trunk myself. You can lie on the sofy an' look at me while I do it. It's the last thing I kin do for yer, Miss May, an' I'll do it all right.”

May gladly accepted the offer, for she was trembling with nervousness. Nancy worked and talked with equal energy, while her young lady reclined on the sofa and watched her, with dreamy eyes and pre-occupied thoughts.

At the end of an hour all was ready, and the two retired. Nancy took possession of the sofa, but before doing so, she closed the blinds of the window in the next room, and placed the lamp on the table near the sleeping governess. When she went back to May, who by this time was in bed, she laughed gleefully, and said :

“My! won’t there be a row when the dragon wakes and finds you gone! I jest wish I dared to stay, and see the fight out ’atween her and old roomatiz.”

May laughed, too; but she said :

“I hope Mrs. Benson will stand on her ‘dignitude,’ and Mrs. Black will scarcely forget what is due to herself so far as to quarrel with the housekeeper. Be quiet now, Nancy, for I must try and compose myself to sleep.”

It was very long, however, before sleep closed her eyelids, but at length from sheer weariness she slept.

May was aroused by the voice of Nancy, who was looking down on her.

“It is a quarter past five, May, and although yer was sleepin’ like a top, I thought I’d better wake yer in time to git ready for breakfast. I’ll help yer to dress quick, an’ ef yer pa comes to the do’, I’ll just pop down behind the bed.”

May sprang up, and commenced her hurried toilet. When it was nearly completed, she asked :

“Have you seen Mrs. Black this morning, Nancy? I am dreadfully afraid that she will wake up before we get away.”

“You needn’t have no dread ’bout her, Miss May. She’s fast enough for two or three hours yet. I looked in at her the first thing when I got up. I don’t think as she’ll be apt to drink wine for her supper after this.”

At that moment a rap came to the door, and Nancy darted to her place of concealment; but it was only Mrs. Gandy, who had been sent to summon Miss Thorne to breakfast.

May went out immediately, and found that Sam., the carriage driver, was waiting to take her trunk. She stepped back, and made a warning gesture to Nancy, who crouched down behind the bed till the man left the room with his burthen. Closing the door, May then went to join her father at the table.

Mr. Thorne was looking less jaded than on the previous night, but he was silent, and irritable; he hurried his daughter through the repast, swallowing his own coffee almost at a scalding temperature, and devoured whatever was set before him. But he laughed grimly as he arose from the table, and said:

“I am anxious to be off before the forsaken governess can find the use of her tongue. I believe I had rather take a shower-bath under Niagara, than have the vials of her wrath poured upon me. Get your bonnet, May, and lay this envelope on the table where Mrs. Black will see it as soon as she regains sense enough to notice anything.”

May took the letter, hurried to her room, and after bidding Nancy good-bye, returned to her father before his patience was exhausted. He allowed her a moment to bid adieu to Mrs. Benson, and then they were whirled away at the utmost speed of the horses.

Nancy effected her escape through the window, and returned to L—— to deliver the messages to Dr. Brandon and Sinclair, of which she was the bearer.

It was late in the day before Mrs. Black awoke. She looked around, slightly bewildered, and wondered

why she was sleeping on the sofa with a shawl thrown over her. She raised herself and called on May to come to her. When no response was returned she was alarmed, and started up to go in search of her pupil.

A chair was drawn up close beside the sofa, on which a letter was placed; peering down at the address she saw that it was for herself, and with a furious clutch at it, she cried:

“She is gone with her lover, and this is to tell me that my reputation as the guardian of youth is forever blasted.”

Although Mrs. Black could not see distant objects without her glasses, she had very perfect vision when anything was brought almost in contact with her eyes. She opened Mr. Thorne’s note, and read it in silent horror. That *she*, above all women, should be accused of neglecting the charge confided to her, and from such a cause, was more than she could calmly bear. She wept, almost tore her hair, and bewailed the loss of the comfortable home she thought she had secured; but she gradually regained her composure, and prepared to depart with as much dignity as was possible under the humiliating circumstances.

She rang and ordered her breakfast sent in to her. When it came, a message was delivered from the housekeeper to the effect that a carriage should be sent from L—— whenever she wished to leave Thornhill, as such had been the orders of the master.

To this Mrs. Black replied, in injured tones:

“I cannot too soon get away from a house in which I have been so infamously treated. Let the vehicle be brought as soon as possible, and I will shake the dust of this place from my feet. I only wish that I had never entered it.”

Barney was dispatched to town for the carriage, and without venturing on an encounter with so disrespectful an antagonist as she knew Mrs. Benson would be, the discomfited teacher packed her clothing and took her departure, whither no one knew, nor cared.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SUNSHINE.

THE next few weeks of May Thorne's life passed as an enchanted dream. She was received by Mrs. Balfour with extreme kindness, and Alice and Louise vied with each other in their efforts to render her happy. Her father treated her with a degree of consideration never before accorded to her, and his betrothed wife seemed interested in her and anxious to win her confidence and affection.

The pretensions of Sinclair had been fully discussed between Mr. Thorne and Mrs. Balfour, and such inquiries made by the former as satisfied him that the young lawyer was one of the rising men of the day, who was sure to win both fame and fortune in the career he had chosen. Indiscreet as May had been, fate had favored her in saving her from bestowing her confidence and affection on one unworthy to win them.

Sinclair came to Cape May, held a friendly interview with his future father-in-law, and was permitted to prosecute his suit to Miss Thorne with the hope of having an early day named for the marriage, provided May would sign certain papers her father had caused to be prepared.

The possession of his daughter's fortune had become most important to Mr. Thorne, for at this crisis he heard from the bond given to Andrew Courtney so long ago. A letter came to him from Robert Orme demanding immediate payment of the claim which had been transferred by the winner to Rosine C. Lapierre, and placed by her in Orme's hands for collection.

This dreaded claim had hung as an incubus upon Thorne for years, and now that it was presented he had saved little more than half the sum needed to liquidate it. Thorne wondered now what madness could have induced him to stake so much at the gaming table; had the winner insisted on immediate payment he must have been irretrievably ruined, but the interval that had elapsed since the bond was given, had enabled him to accumulate enough to release him, provided May's thousands were added to his savings. He had no scruples as to possessing himself of them, for he said to himself that he would make it up to her by setting aside a certain portion of his annual income, and investing it for her benefit.

Thorne permitted the sunshine of perfect happiness to fall for a few weeks upon the path of his daughter, in the certainty that she would make any worldly sacrifice sooner than relinquish what was so unutterably precious to her. He said nothing more to *her* of the price that he intended to exact for the consent to her marriage, but he made it very clear to Sinclair that the money must be paid into his hands, or all hope of gaining him over abandoned. The lover was willing, nay, almost anxious to prove his perfect disinterestedness by taking May without a penny to her dower; but after she fully explained to him the ground of her scruples

he could not urge her to violate the promise she had made to her dead mother, and the subject was tacitly ignored by all three of them till the time for action arrived.

This was postponed at the request of Claire. On the evening after the reception of Robert Orme's letter the two sat together in Mr. Balfour's private parlor. The rest of the party had gone to the beach, but Claire complained of a slight headache, and declined going with them. When Thorne heard that she was left alone he returned at once to the hotel and joined her.

He found her sitting beside an open window which looked toward the restless, moaning sea, with an expression on her face which told that her own heart fully sympathized with the low monotone which came to her ears as a wail over lost hopes and buried affections. The sun had set, and crimson and purple clouds trailed across the horizon, through the rents of which gleamed the opaline sky.

A fearful struggle had for days been going on in the soul of Claire. To crush this man beneath her imperious feet had been her one object in seeking him again, yet in spite of her struggles to maintain the supremacy of her will, she found her resolutions sapped, hour by hour, by the insidious love that awakened from its long slumber into as new and vivid life as in those early days of romance in which she had trusted him so implicitly, only to be forsaken.

In vain did she recapitulate all her wrongs to herself, and seek to crush the interest he inspired—she *could not* give up her long cherished schemes, and lay aside all thoughts of bringing home to him the anguish he had inflicted on her—though in her heart was the

conviction that, in crushing him, she would destroy herself.

Mrs. Balfour constantly urged her to reveal herself in her true character to Mr. Thorne, exchange mutual forgiveness, and accept such happiness as might be found in renewing the ties so long broken; but Claire was not prepared for this: in spite of the love she acknowledged to herself she cherished for him, she could not forego the desire to strike as severe a blow upon his heart as he had once struck to hers. She did not trust him; she thought if she again placed herself utterly in his power; if she admitted that he had regained all his old influence over her, Thorne would be capable of abusing it as he had once already done.

In spite of his adoring protestations of affection Claire did not believe Walter Thorne capable of treating any woman who stood to him in the relation of wife with the tenderness she would have a right to demand. His temper was haughty and overbearing; he considered himself before every other human being, while she, on her side, was exacting, and not less fiery than himself.

This evening Claire had gone over the whole ground again, and with a weary sigh, she muttered:

“We can never be happy together again, so why should I hesitate as to walking in the course I have already marked out for myself? I am weak, untrue to myself, to waver a single moment. How I can forget the past so far as to welcome his presence with a happy thrill at my heart is more than I can understand. After all he has made me suffer, I should loathe the sound of his voice, yet—yet it gladdens me in spite of myself. Ah! if I could only believe in him again—if I *could*!”

"If you could do what?" asked the voice of him of whom she was thinking, in most softly modulated tones. "Mrs. Balfour told me you are not quite well this evening, and I came back to cheer you up and make you forget your indisposition, if that is possible."

In spite of herself, the light leaped to Claire's eyes, and a sweet smile curved her lips.

"I am not much indisposed; I have only a slight headache, brought on by too intense thought. You had better go back to the others, and leave me to think out, and solve the problem of my own destiny."

"I thought that had already been accomplished, Clara. Your destiny in the future is to be loved, and petted as woman never was before by an adoring husband. This is the thirteenth of the month, and in another week I shall have the right to call you mine. I count the days which lie between myself and the realization of the brightest dream my heart has ever cherished."

He had placed himself beside her, and throwing his arm around her he drew her to his side, till her head rested against his breast. Claire made a faint effort to release herself, but the firm clasp in which she was held vanquished her, and she sat quite still a few moments. Suddenly she raised her head and asked:

"How can you love me thus when I have treacherously usurped the place I came to ask you to restore to her you once professed to adore? Is it that you find in my nature a want of faith which makes us kindred souls? When Rosine learns that I have listened to your beguiling tongue what will she think—what will she have a right to say of me?"

Thorne lightly replied:

"What matters it to you, or to me? She cannot come between us to mar our happiness, and I have long ago ignored every claim she may fancy herself to have upon me. If Rose would be mine again, it would not be through any love for me, but through her desire to regain the position from which she was thrust through no fault of my own, remember. It was my father's will that severed us—now it is *mine* that widens the breach between us. You came, saw and conquered; and she will have no right to complain that my heart awoke to new life beneath the influence of your smiles. I own that I am flattered that I have conquered her who was considered invincible, but I do not impute to you any thought of treachery toward your cousin. I won you to love me through the conviction of your own heart that I should never return to her."

"We are thought much alike—if she had come hither herself perhaps the result might have been different."

"We will not speculate on possibilities—I accept facts as they stand—and I am more than satisfied with the exchange I have made."

"Yet Mrs. Balfour assured me that you sought me in the hope that you could learn something of Rosine, that you might do her such tardy justice as lay in your power."

"I might have had such a thought—nay, I admit that I did have it, but it was the offspring of self-interest, I am afraid, more than of any sentimental recollection of what we had once been to each other. I am going to make a confession to you Clara, and I hope you will not judge me hardly—I have at times

in my life been a very reckless man—I have thrown away thousands at the gaming-table, but I pledge you my word never to do so again. It is now nearly four years since I met Andrew Courtnay in Washington. He played with me one night with such an extraordinary run of luck that he won from me a sum of money which would have impoverished me if he had exacted payment at the time.

“He did not do that—he accepted my bond, and gave me the singular assurance that as long as my wife lived, he should not call on me for a settlement. I know what he meant to do : that bond was to be given to Rose, to use against me in the time to come ; but I was resolved that she should not triumph in my ruin. I retrenched my expenditure from that day, and I have saved more than half the sum due.”

“When Agnes died, I own for a little while my heart returned to its old allegiance, but I had not then seen you. I thought it would be a good idea to cancel the claim by taking my first wife back if she would consent to come, therefore I sought information from Ada. I met you at her house, and you know the rest.

“But the conviction on my mind that Rosine held the bond against me has been confirmed to-day. I have a letter from a Mr. Orme in New York, who informs me that it has been placed in his hands for collection by Rosine Lapierre. Since she cannot reclaim my hand, she seems determined to secure a large portion of my fortune.”

Claire withdrew her encircling arm, and coldly said :

“You cannot justly accuse Rosine of such an intention, for she refused to accept any provision from your father’s estate, and I assure you that she is quite inde-

pendent through the munificence of her half brother."

"Yes, she refused what she had every claim to, for the purpose of showing her contempt for me—but she is older now, and understands the value of money better. Since she has heard nothing from you, she doubtless considers your mission a failure, and consoles herself with striking a blow at my property. Gold is a panacea for many ills, and Rose evidently intends to get as much of mine as she possibly can. So much for her former disinterestedness."

All the old resentment of Claire surged up at this. This man had never understood, or appreciated her. He had crushed her, and she would no longer waver in her determination to repay him, cost what it might to herself. She said:

"We will no longer discuss Rose or her motives, if you please. She has demanded this money of you, and you say that you have but half the amount necessary to cancel this debt of *honor*. If you tell me this as an appeal to me to aid you after we are married, I can only remind you of what I have already told you, that my property is so tied up that I can only use the income arising from it."

"I was not thinking of *that* means of extricating myself from my difficulties, for I had far rather give to you, than rob you of what is your own. There is a way to obtain the money, and I hope you will not shrink from using your influence with my daughter to induce her to lay aside some absurd scruples she has on the score of a promise she made to her mother. May's fortune will enable me to pay the whole of this debt, and I need not remind you that, at any sacrifice, it must be settled. I should feel disgraced among

honorable men if I fail promptly to meet the demand. In a few years, I can return the whole to my daughter."

Claire could with difficulty repress the scornful bitterness she felt as she replied :

"It is a singular code of honor which leads a man to ask such a sacrifice as this from his daughter, and she, too, on the eve of marriage with a poor man. May will need her fortune more now than a few years hence. Why have you asked so repugnant a service of me as to persuade her to do that which may permanently injure the prospects of herself and her husband?"

"My dear Clara, young Sinclair has assured me that the possession of the few thousands May can claim, are of no importance to him. He is so desirous of proving his disinterestedness that he seems rather anxious to have them transferred to me: but my daughter hesitates on the score of that promise to her mother. It will be but a temporary loan to me, and the income arising from Sinclair's profession is amply sufficient to support the young couple in the modest style in which they propose to live. All I ask of you is to disabuse May's mind of the idea that she is committing a wrong, by violating her promise to the dead. I think I have a right to the use of this money, for all the wrong and evil of my life sprang from the belief, on my father's part, that I would gain a magnificent fortune with the woman he compelled me to marry. She brought *me* nothing but wretchedness; she held the little she possessed absolutely under her own control, and bequeathed every cent of it to her child. I only ask the use of it a few years, to save me from comparative ruin. I must either sell Thornhill, or alienate a large

portion of my income to enable me to raise what I need. As the future mistress of my house, you should be willing to assist me to retain it. May already has great confidence in you, and I am sure she will do this, if you assure her that it will not be wrong to do so."

With sudden animation, Claire exclaimed :

"Thornhill must be retained at all hazards. If that is at stake I must aid you to the best of my ability. Of course your daughter will sacrifice her own interests sooner than see the home in which she was born and reared pass into the hands of strangers. But I have a delicacy in speaking with May on this subject till after we are married. When she stands to me in the relation of a daughter, I can say to her what would scarcely be proper now."

My dearest Clara, I thank you sincerely for this concession. You will prevail, as you always do, and a few weeks of delay do not signify. I will write to Mr. Orme and assure him that the whole sum shall be paid within six weeks."

"You may safely do so, for I am certain that I can use such arguments as will convince May that it will be her duty to assist her living father, even if she violates her promise to her dead mother."

Thorne regarded her enquiringly a few moments, and then abruptly asked :

"Why did the prospect of losing Thornhill move you to such sudden animation? You have never seen the place, and its possession cannot be a matter of much importance to you, beautiful as it is. I scarcely think you will care to live there, for the neighborhood is not a lively one, and such society as L—— affords will scarcely be to the taste of so brilliant a woman as you are."

The gathering twilight concealed from him the sudden pallor that overspread her face, and she moved farther from him that he might not detect the shiver that ran through her frame as the memory of that visit to his father's house and all that resulted from it flashed on her mind. She steadied her voice, and replied :

“I have had such vivid descriptions of the place from Mrs. Balfour and your daughter that I feel as if I knew it well. Besides, there is something extremely painful to me in the necessity which compels a man to give up the home of his family ; if you can avoid it, do so by all means. I have thought of myself as the mistress of Thornhill, until it seems an integral portion of yourself. I do not wish to make a bridal trip : let us go to your home at once, and spend our honeymoon there. May can prepare to be married in the next few weeks, and under your own roof give her hand to the man of her choice.”

“So let it be—I shall have you all to myself there, for we will not summon our friends around us till the time for my daughter's nuptials arrives. Oh, Clara, if you could read my heart—if you could see how proud and happy I am to know that I am the chosen of your heart, you would comprehend the depth and sincerity of the passion with which you have inspired me.”

Claire arose, and with a laugh, said :

“I believe I understand all that, Mr. Thorne. You are in earnest now, if you never have been in any of your former wooings. I give you credit for sincerity, yet I fear that your wedded experience with me will bring you little more happiness than you found with your last wife. Let us join the others on the beach now ; my headache is gone, and I feel as if the fresh sea air will brighten my spirits.”

She threw a black lace shawl over her head, and they went out together. As they walked toward the beach, he gravely asked :

“Why should you have a doubt as to your ability to render me the most blissfully-contented of men? At last I have found what I have long felt the want of, sympathy and affection from the woman on whom my own heart is set. There must be love on both sides, or there can be no real union, as my hapless fate has shown me. I adore you, and I cannot be mistaken in believing that you give me in return a fair equivalent for all I lavish on you.”

“Yes—I love you. I cannot resist the power you have over me, I confess it; but I do not glory in it as a woman should in the affection she gives and accepts from her future husband. You are not a good man, Walter Thorne—and only to such is perfect trust given; but such as you are, I love you, and I feel that you are good enough for me. I warn you that we shall not be happy, for we have within us the elements of discord that will make themselves felt. You have your past, and I mine. You have not asked me of my former life, but in good time you shall know what it has been. When that knowledge comes to you, you will understand why a ghost from it will come to poison all dreams of bliss for me.”

She spoke in a low, rapid tone, as if the words were forced from her lips without any volition of her own. Thorne ardently replied :

“I ask to know nothing but that you love me. I know that I am not a good man, but your influence, your sweetness, can restore my better nature. I have grown bitter, hard and scornful under the galling yoke

I bore so long, but with you all will be life, and light, and joy. I know that you, like myself, have had an unhappy wedded experience, but we can atone to each other for all that others have made us suffer. The ghost shall be exorcised, Clara."

"Atonement, retribution, justification—they underlie all the actions of life," she said, in a vague tone. "I shall marry you, but what the end will be, God alone knows."

By this time they had drawn near the promenaders on the beach, and they were speedily surrounded by their own party. Thorne felt a little chilled by Claire's words and manner, and he began to dread that his new castle in the air would crumble into ruins at his feet, but he felt that if Claire were buried with him beneath those ruins it would be a better fate for him than living on without her. She fascinated, enthralled, enchanted him to that degree that he felt as if life would lose all its value and significance without her companionship.

When they joined their friends the sudden change in her manner electrified him; the vague sadness that had hung around her disappeared as if by magic, and she laughed and jested with those around her even with more than her usual animation.

When they returned to their parlor she played and sang, but selected the gayest music she could remember. When she was asked for a sentimental song, she laughed, and said:

"Not to-night; I am not in a pensive mood; and my music always echoes the feelings of my heart."

Towards the close of the evening, Thorne approached her, and spoke in a low tone:

"I am glad that the cloud was so temporary. You

are a creature of impulse, but I find all your caprices charming :

She looked up at him, and asked :

“Do you understand the cause of the reaction in my spirits? No, I see you do not, so I will tell you. I was thinking of what we have settled on—anticipating the days we shall spend in the solitude of Thornhill, ‘the world forgetting, by the world forgot’—temporarily, I mean, of course. I promise you one month of happiness, at least, for that I owe you.”

“You owe me, rather, a life-time of devotion, in return for what I give to you.”

With a gay laugh, she replied :

“I always pay my debts to the uttermost farthing. Good night ; I feel tired, and my headache has come back. I must go to bed and sleep it off before our journey to-morrow. You know that we leave for Philadelphia in the afternoon, but you are not to go with us. You are to stay here, and do penance for your sins till you come to claim me. I cannot have my time monopolized by you while I am preparing for the important event.”

“I shall not obey orders. In twenty-four hours I will follow you, but I promise not to encroach upon your other engagements. Good night.”

Claire went to her room, but in spite of her alleged headache, she did not retire. She sat beside the open window in that state of unrest which effectually banishes sleep. Now that the crisis of her destiny so nearly approached, she felt a dread and doubt of her own power to carry out the bitter programme she had laid out for herself. She said to herself that she would have relented had not Thorne shown such hard

indifference to that past which was of such vital moment to her. She felt chilled and revolted by what he had that evening said of the woman who had placed fatal trust in him. At *his* hands she surely deserved more consideration. Thorne evidently thought only of himself, for had he not told her that self-interest alone prompted him to think of repairing the wrong he insisted he had been forced to commit.

Yet in spite of all, she knew that she loved him—loved him with that unreasoning passionate clinging which would have led a woman of a different temperament to endure all things at his hands sooner than be separated from him. But she was haughty as Milton's fallen angel, and all her love for him could not stifle the desire for retribution for the past.

She arose at last and threw herself upon the bed, completely worn out with the conflict of feeling through which she had passed. Her head throbbed, but her heart ached far more terribly, for her mind was made up to adhere to the determination with which she had crossed the Atlantic.

On the following morning Claire arose at a very late hour; she scarcely touched the breakfast that was brought up to her, though she eagerly drank the strong coffee, hoping it would act as a stimulant, and restring her quivering nerves.

For years she had asserted and believed that her heart was dead, but it seemed suddenly to have awakened into new and more vivid life, if she were to judge of its condition by the bitter pangs that rent it in twain when she thought of all that lay before her in the next four weeks of her life.

When she at length descended to the private parlor

of Mrs. Balfour, she found no one there save Sinclair, who had just come in and asked for Miss Thorne. A message came from May, requesting him to excuse her for half an hour, as she was particularly engaged.

When the servant left the room, Claire turned to him, and said :

“ I am glad that I came down so opportunely, Mr. Sinclair, for I have something to say to you which is of some interest to yourself.”

Claire had watched the young lover with keen eyes, and she believed him worthy of the confidence she was about to repose in him. He smiled, took a seat near her, and prepared to listen, though he was at a loss to know what Madame L'Epine could have to say to him. He admired her very much, but he earnestly hoped that he should be able to withdraw May from her influence at an early day. Sinclair could not understand the fitful temperament of a being so unlike himself, and he was not inclined to place implicit confidence in her as the guardian and maternal counsellor of his future wife.

After a slight pause Claire said :

“ I find it difficult to speak freely on a subject that is important to both you and myself, and I must exact of you a promise that what passes between us this morning shall be considered as confidential.”

“ Assuredly, Madame, if such is your wish. Any confidence you may honor me with shall be held sacred.”

“ Thank you—I know I can trust you, for I am too good a judge of character to be deceived in you. I understand from Mr. Thorne that the marriage of his daughter with yourself depends on a contingency.

Will you be candid with me and state to me exactly the terms on which he has told you his consent is to be gained? ”

Sinclair hesitated a moment, and then frankly replied :

“ There is no reason why I shall not tell you, Madame, since you will soon be placed in a position that will entitle you to a full knowledge of the whole affair. As the price of his consent to our union, Mr. Thorne demands of May the surrender of her fortune, allowing her to reserve a few thousand dollars to supply her with pin money, I suppose. So far as I am concerned, I would gladly relinquish the whole of it, for I am able and willing to labor for the support of the woman I marry ; but May has some conscientious scruples on the score of a promise she made to her mother just before her death. Mr. Thorne has allowed me to come hither, to aspire openly to his daughter, in the belief that this glimpse of happiness will render May less unwilling to do violence to her sense of right, when she finds our fate dependent on the concession he insists on. I feel like a man to whom the cup of bliss is proffered only to be withdrawn before the magic draught reaches the lips, but I cannot urge May to do what her conscience may condemn.”

“ I partly understood this before, but I was not aware that Mr. Thorne made the surrender of his daughter's fortune the absolute condition of his consent to her union with you. I know that it is of vital moment to him to obtain the temporary use of a large sum of money, but I can assure you that it is only a loan, which I give you my word shall be repaid before May is your wife a week. You may tell her this much and

say to her that I have in my hands the power to replace her fortune, with something added to it as a gift from her father, for the accommodation he asks. You must both accept my word alone as a guarantee of repayment, and if you can do so, your marriage shall take place on the twentieth of October, exactly one month after my own."

"Oh! Madame L'Epine, you overwhelm me with your kindness. From yourself, from your own resources, I doubt not the debt will be liquidated, but as you will be Mr. Thorne's wife, and his interests yours, I think May may avail herself of your liberality to regain what is justly her own. I have no interest in it, I wish you to understand that, for I have declared to her from the first that her fortune shall be settled on herself."

With a smile that was very faint and sad, Claire replied:

"It matters not from what source the money is derived, provided it is honestly mine to do with as I please. Proceed with your preparations for your marriage, Mr. Sinclair, and induce May to comply with her father's demands; it is the only way to secure your future, and if it is done at all, it must be done quickly. I exact, however, from both yourself and Miss Thorne the most profound secrecy as to my agency in this affair. After you are married and gone, I shall let Mr. Thorne know the measures I took to release him from his embarrassment without injury to his daughter's prospects."

"Madame, you are an angel of goodness, and I earnestly beg your pardon for not before appreciating you as you deserve. I place implicit faith in your

promises, and I pledge myself that my betrothed shall do the same, May loves you already, and your word will be to her as good as your bond. I feel now as if I have reached firm ground at last, and to you I owe this feeling of security."

"You owe me nothing—I am only trying to remedy an injustice forced by circumstances on the man I am about to marry. Mr. Thorne is not aware of my power to aid him in this strait, and I wish to reserve all knowledge of it till I inform him that the debt has been canceled, and in what manner. I trust to your discretion and that of May to betray nothing."

"Of course we shall both be upon honor; after doing so much for us as you propose, we should be most ungrateful to forestal the pleasant surprise you have prepared for Mr. Thorne."

"No doubt it will be very *pleasant*," she said with a slight quiver of her sensitive lips. "I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have made two young hearts happy. I believe you to be worthy of May, Mr. Sinclair, and I have seen for myself how much in love you are with each other. Your union will be founded on mutual faith and trust, and I believe I am doing right in trying to secure it before——"

She broke off abruptly, and colored slightly, but at that moment May came in fresh and smiling, to greet her lover. She seemed surprised to find him in earnest conversation with Madame L'Epine, but the light in Sinclair's face told her that the interview had been a very pleasant one to him. The young girl said:

"I am glad to see you looking as well as usual, Madame L'Epine, but Cousin Ada is afraid that you will not be able to make the journey to Philadelphia

this afternoon. As you did not come down to breakfast, she feared that your headache still troubled you."

"I am quite recovered from that, as I will assure her myself. I am quite ready, and a little anxious for the flitting."

She kissed the brow of May, and whispered :

"Mr. Sinclair has something to say to you from me—trust your fate in my hands, May, and all shall come right."

She left the room, and May turned to her lover for an explanation of her words. When it had been given, she said :

"I would trust her to any extent, Harry, for she is a noble, and warm-hearted woman. I am glad she has afforded me this loophole of escape, for I have wished a thousand times that I could find any plausible excuse for disobeying mamma's commands. A loan for a few weeks, with Madame L'Epine as security for its repayment, is very different from what papa asked. We shall be happy at last, thanks to her."

"Then commence your preparations at once, my love, for the twentieth of October has been named by her for our marriage. I am more grateful for that, I believe, than for the promise to repay your fortune."

"So soon ! That is but five weeks from to-day."

"I wish it were only five days, for my part."

That afternoon the whole party, with the exception of Thorne, left for Philadelphia. He reluctantly remained behind, but Claire forbade him to come with them, and he obeyed, though he followed them almost immediately. The week that intervened before their marriage was occupied by shopping and mantuamakers.

Claire's wardrobe was so elegant and extensive that she needed little beside a traveling dress and veil, but the trousseau of May was to be provided. This Mrs. Balfour took upon herself, and the heart of the younger bride elect was elated by the beautiful and becoming things purchased for her.

May relinquished to her father the control of her bank stock, and he, in his turn, was very liberal in the outfit he presented her. At his request, she reluctantly consented to lay aside the mourning she wore for her mother, but his manner toward her had changed so much that she could refuse him nothing; and she reflected that it would be rather awkward for her to wear the robes consecrated to the memory of the dead, when her mother's place was filled by another.

May went with Sinclair to see the home he had prepared for her, and found Nancy installed as housekeeper. The delight of Miss Bean was boundless when she learned that all the obstacles were cleared away, and her young lady would, in a few weeks, be installed as mistress of the pretty suburban cottage.

The marriage of the long-severed husband and wife was very private. It took place in the cathedral at an early hour of the morning, and they set out for Thornhill immediately after the ceremony was performed. May was to remain with the Balfours three weeks longer, and then the whole party were to be reunited in her father's house, and remain there till after her wedding.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CLAIRE'S VENGEANCE.

THE brief month of happiness which Claire had allowed herself was drawing to a close. Thorne had devoted himself to her, and he seemed even more contented in this new phase of his life than he had been in that other honeymoon they had passed together so long ago. This was bitter to Claire, for, unreasonable as it was, she was jealous for that other self whose memory seemed so utterly indifferent to her husband.

If Thorne had betrayed any regret for his inconstancy, any sympathy for the forsaken one, she might have relented, but day by day he told her that never before had he loved—never before known what true happiness was.

When she ventured to refer to his first marriage, he refused to listen, sealing her lips with kisses and entreating:

“Don’t bring up that phantom to poison your faith in me, Clara. I was little more than a boy in those days, and the short-lived passion I felt for Rosine was but a pale glimmer compared with that I cherish for you. You are the light of my life—the joy of my heart, and I ask no brighter lot than will be mine with your companionship.”

“Short-lived passion!” repeated Claire; “is it true that you soon ceased to love that hapless creature? Oh, Walter! this gives me a new and painful glimpse of your fickle nature.”

“Don’t speak in that tone, my darling. If I have

been inconstant to one woman and harsh toward another, I will atone for it all by my unswerving devotion to you. Let the name of Rosine be tabooed between us. It is not pleasant to me to recur to that episode in my verdant youth, and if I could I would gladly bury it in utter oblivion."

Claire bent her head down and made no reply, but he felt her shiver as if with an ague, and she withdrew herself from his encircling arm. In some alarm he asked:

"Are you ill, Clara? Why do you look so strangely? One would think that although you are my wife, you would be glad to have me regard that early escapade of mine in a sentimental rather than in a sensible manner. Rosine is nothing, can be nothing to me, for her image faded from my heart years ago. The interest with which she once inspired me has long been dead, and if I had been foolish enough to wish to revive it, I do not think we could have been happy together. Years of bitter resentment on one side and desertion on the other could not easily have been condoned."

Thorne said this because he believed Claire to be jealous of those early memories. He thought she wished to probe his soul and satisfy herself that she really reigned supreme over the forsaken idol of his youth. He could have no clue to her real feelings, for he had never suspected her identity. There were moments in which she forcibly reminded him of his early love, but he attributed the resemblance to the tie of blood between them, which Claire had asserted, but that he had re-married his own wife had never once dawned on his mind. She recovered her composure and said quietly:

"Your assurances satisfy me that your heart has utterly shaken off its early allegiance. I shall name Rosine no more to you. It is unfortunate that she is not as indifferent to the memories of the past as you seem to be."

"That is a strange thing for *you* to say, Clara. I *know* that you love me, yet you speak as if you resent inconstancy to another. I wish I could understand you, for, at times, you are a strange riddle to me. You pique my curiosity, and I begin to wish to hear that life history you promised me before our marriage."

"I cannot give it to you this evening," she replied, with a forced laugh. "You shall soon know all my past—that is, all in which you can take any interest. Our guests may arrive at any moment, and between this time and May's marriage there will be no opportunity to dilate on my life experience. When that is over, you shall know all I have to tell."

"It will be but a week, and I can wait that long. I hear a carriage driving to the entrance now. But, Clara, remember one thing—nothing that you can have to reveal can change my feelings toward you. Even if you tell me that you adored that other man, who, Ada says, treated you badly, I will still cling to the belief that you now love me better than you ever loved him. I will show such tender care for you, that you must place me in the highest place in your heart."

"No other has ever held as warm a place there as yourself," she impulsively replied. "Believe that, let what will happen."

"Why, what on earth can you apprehend, Clara? Nothing could touch me nearly but losing you, and of that there can be no danger. We are both in perfect

health—we are bound together by legal ties, cemented by affection, and I look forward to many years of happiness in your dear companionship.”

“I scarcely know what I meant,” she hurriedly replied. “A sad and brooding presentiment of evil has fallen on me, but I will shake it off. Come—we must not linger here, for I hear voices in the hall, and we must go to meet our friends.”

In a few more moments they were in the midst of the group of travelers, and May threw her arms around her father's neck and kissed him more than once. He returned the caress, and then resigned her to her new mother, while he welcomed Mr. Balfour and his wife to Thornhill with that cordial grace which he could display toward those he really liked.

While they all talked together a few moments Mrs. Balfour keenly regarded the husband and wife, and she thought:

“It is all right at last; they have found the haven of content, and neither one will willingly forsake it again.”

May took her two young friends to the room prepared for them, that they might remove their dusty traveling dresses and make a fresh toilette before supper was served, and Claire accompanied Mrs. Balfour to her apartment, leaving the two gentlemen together.

Ada threw aside her bonnet and mantle, and turning to Claire, eagerly asked:

“Have you told him all, Claire? Have you become perfectly reconciled to each other? Though of course you have, for I never saw Walter looking so well and so happy.”

“I believe he is happy, but it is because he is still in

the dark as to my past history. I have not told him, Ada; it is not my intention to reveal myself to him till I have perfectly re-established my old influence over him. I wished no cloud to cross our horizon for the first few weeks of our reunion, but after May is married and gone I shall tell him all."

"It would have been better to have no concealment from the first; but you are a willful woman, and must have your own way. You love Walter, or you would never have placed yourself in his power a second time, Claire, and to that love I trust for the solution of all your difficulties. Perhaps it was best to make him feel how necessary you are to him before you draw aside the curtain and show him the comedy you have played so successfully."

"That was my impression, but we have no time to talk of that now. In half an hour supper will be on the table, and I will leave you to make such changes in your dress as you may wish. I will send a servant up to assist you."

Claire escaped from the room, and she took care to afford Mrs. Balfour no further opportunity to question her in private during the days that intervened before the important one in which she would more fully understand the resentful and passionate nature she had vainly endeavored to influence. Claire sustained her part so well—Thorne was so openly devoted to her, that both Mr. Balfour and his wife congratulated each other on the good understanding that seemed to exist between their host and hostess, and he said:

"I knew all would come right. When two people love each other as they do, nothing can keep them from being happy together. The revelation of her identity

with the object of his first passion will fill Thorne with astonishment, but he will only feel that he has illustrated the truth of the French proverb, '*One always returns to his first love.*'"

Thornhill had not yet been thrown open to the outside world, but on the night of May's marriage a large company was expected to be present. On that occasion Thorne intended to inaugurate the new style of life he intended to adopt; his house should henceforth be the centre of hospitality for the country, and with its brilliant mistress, he felt assured that no other would be able to rival it in attractiveness. Claire apparently entered into all his plans for the social regeneration of the neighborhood, but in reality she listened with a sad and pre-occupied heart. She would not hearken to the pleadings of conscience which told her how wrong she was to cast the soul she might have redeemed from its worst faults down into the depths again, leaving it a prey to gloom and remorse. She would only listen to her own bitter sense of wrong and harden herself in her resolution to forsake him in the hour of his most supreme content, even as he had abandoned her.

On the evening before the bridal, Sinclair arrived at L——, and after taking a room at the hotel, made a brief call at Thornhill. Dr. Brandon, who was enchanted with the turn affairs had taken, had met Mr. Thorne in a friendly manner, the latter ignoring the part he had taken in favor of the lovers; the good doctor and his family were among the expected guests, and few rejoiced more sincerely in the approaching union.

Sinclair was the bearer of a letter to Mrs. Thorne,

which had been sent to him from New York, with injunctions to deliver it into her own hands. Claire was expecting this communication, and she went out to receive him as soon as she heard of his arrival.

The greeting between them was very friendly, and Sinclair said :

“ I should not have intruded here this evening, Mrs. Thorne, but for the express command contained in Mr. Orme’s note to place this letter in your hand as soon after my arrival as possible. As he said it was very important, I feared to entrust it to a messenger.”

“ Thank you ; I looked for it from your own hand alone, and when I heard you were here, I knew the errand that brought you. Mr. Orme is a lawyer, and an old friend of mine. I trusted to him the settlement for May in lieu of the bank stock she gave up to her father. If you will excuse me a moment, Mr. Sinclair, I will read what he says.”

The young man bowed, and she glanced over the few lines written by Mr. Orme. They assured her that her instructions had been carried out, and the whole sum paid him by Walter Thorne had been settled on his daughter. The requisite vouchers would be forwarded to Mr. Harry Sinclair within a week after his union with Miss Thorne.

As she replaced the missive in its envelope, she smiled brightly upon him, and said :

“ It is all right, Mr. Sinclair. The temporary loan made by May to her father will bear good interest when it is repaid to her. I do not wish either you or her to cavil at the addition made to her fortune, for I assure you it will not be drawn from my own resources. I cannot explain now, but in a few days you will

know how I came to have the control of this money, with both a legal and moral right to bestow it upon my husband's daughter as a dower."

Sinclair smilingly replied :

" Few persons are inclined to cavil at good fortune, Mrs. Thorne. I am sure that I am every way your debtor, for if you had not played the part of the good fairy to May, she would never have gained her own consent to disobey her mother's injunctions."

" Do not speak of obligations to me, Mr. Sinclair ; you owe me nothing, I assure you. Chance placed in my hands the power to serve both Mr. Thorne and his daughter, and I have availed myself of it. When you return to your own house in Philadelphia, you will find a package there containing a full explanation of the whole affair, and by that time you will understand my motives for maintaining the secrecy I have enjoined. Until you know all the bearings of the case, you must be as reticent as heretofore."

Claire earnestly regarded him, and he hastened to say :

" Of course I will obey you in the most minute particulars. Lawyers know how to keep secrets, you know."

She laughed, and replied :

This is not a very important one, but it is my whim to have it faithfully guarded till I have given Mr. Thorne a surprise I have carefully prepared for him. Of course this visit was to *me*, as you could scarcely hope to see May this evening. But as a reward for bringing me such good news, I will tell you that she is walking in the grounds with Alice and Louise, and I do not object to allowing you to follow them."

Sinclair took the hint thus given, arose, thanked her warmly, and walked out in the direction of the old trysting place, where he found the three girls in the bower. After spending half an hour with them, he was peremptorily ordered by the trio to return to L——, by the lower gate, and be seen no more at Thornhill till he came in state, attended by his grooms-men to assume the responsibilities of a Benedict.

Alice and Louise were to be May's attendants, and two young friends of Sinclair were to wait on him. The elder one, Charles Gardner, was the only son of a wealthy merchant in Philadelphia. He had met with Alice at Cape May, and been one of her most devoted admirers. He accepted the invitation to act as grooms-man to his friend, with the determination to avail himself of the opportunity to press his own suit to as happy an ending as that of Sinclair. We may as well state here that he did this successfully, though their union did not take place till a year later, as Mr. Balfour considered Alice too young to bestow her hand on her suitor, and her stepmother wished her to see something more of society before she settled in life.

Golden October was in its prime, and the day of the marriage was one of its brightest. "Blessed is the bride the sun shines on," and May repeated it to herself, and fully believed in its truth, for she had perfect faith in the man to whom she was about to confide her whole future life.

Mrs. Benson had recovered her health, and her equanimity, though the latter was much upset by the marriage of her master, and the extinction of her own aspiring hopes. But she shook her head among her own particular gossips and oracularly said :

"The new Madame is mighty fine, and uncommon perlite. Mr. Thorne lowers his dignitude by allers lettin' her have her own way, a thing as he never did afore to any one. But 'twon't last. *He'll* git tired o' playin' the deludin' lovyer, and *She'll* cut up a tantrum afore long, as 'ill put and eend to the sicknin' lovemakin' of two that is old enuff to know better. Mrs. Thorne aint no chicken, and *he* is nigh on to forty, though he don't look it."

Such was the consolation the housekeeper took to herself, unconscious how true a prophet she would prove, and of how terrible a nature the "tantrum" she predicted would be.

A gay and brilliant crowd assembled at Thornhill that night. The house gleamed with lights, and the music of a fine band, stationed in the hall, swept out on the air. A wedding march was played as the bridal party descended the winding staircase, warning the guests of their approach.

Alice and Louise, robed in floating clouds of pale blue tarletan, looped with white roses, came first with their cavaliers; then the bride and groom, the former in white silk, over which was worn a robe of Brussels point, with a veil to match, fastened on with a wreath of orange buds. This costly dress was a present from her stepmother, and the pearls that glittered on her arms and neck were the gift of her father.

It is the right of every happy bride to look lovelier on the occasion of her marriage than ever before, and many who had passed May by as a merely pretty girl, were surprised at the transformation made by elegant and becoming attire. Yet the improvement was not alone due to this; the atmosphere of affectionate ap-

preciation in which she had lately lived, had lifted from her really bright nature the cloud which had so long depressed her spirits, and reflected its sombreness upon her expressive face. Her features now wore an expression of serene content and confidence in the future, and all acknowledged that they had rarely seen a fairer, or more self-possessed bride.

An Episcopal Bishop performed the ceremony, and congratulations were offered not only to the newly-wedded pair, but also to the handsome host, and the beautiful woman beside him who so gracefully sustained herself in her new position. Mrs. Thorne attracted more observation and comment than any other present, and many speculated on the chances of happiness in the third union of the master of Thornhill, and wondered how long the present smiling aspect of affairs would continue. All agreed in attributing the change in his conduct towards his daughter to the influence of the new wife, and many were the hopes whispered among the guests that Claire would continue to rule the turbulent spirit of her husband for his own good. Many shook their heads and doubted the result, for Walter Thorne was thought a "bad case" by his old neighbors, and they were of the opinion that this brilliant stranger had unwittingly entered into the lion's den, in which she would be sure to find the same fate which had overtaken her predecessors.

Claire sustained her part bravely—she was courteous and attentive to her guests, gay with the young, dignified with those of more mature age, and all united in the verdict that a more elegant, or attractive woman had never graced their provincial society.

There was dancing for those who liked it, games,

promenading, and conversation for those who preferred them, and the hostess flitted from group to group, bringing with her new animation, and enjoyment:—yet if any of those people could have looked into her heart, they would have been appalled by the struggle that was going on there. In this supreme crisis of her fate Claire felt as if it would be easier to die than to inflict the blow she meditated upon the husband she knew she loved with all the power of her passionate heart; yet she never for a moment wavered in her purpose. All her preparations had been secretly completed, and this night, amid the confusion of the departing guests, she meant to effect her escape from Thornhill, perhaps never to return.

She closed her heart to every relenting whisper by repeating to herself:

“*He* has said we could never be happy together if reunited, and I believe he spoke the truth. I will go and be far enough away to escape his reproaches when he learns the trick I have practiced upon him. He may never forgive me—but if he does—if he seeks me, knowing who I am, I will not refuse to return to him.”

At midnight a magnificent supper was served, and soon after it was over, the guests began to call for their carriages. At this crisis, the lady of the house disappeared, and her husband apologized for her sudden withdrawal by stating to his guests that Mrs. Thorne was suffering from a severe headache, and he hoped they would excuse her. He told them that Thornhill would henceforth redeem its reputation, and become the seat of gayety, and hospitality, and his guests declared themselves so much charmed with the first entertainment, that they would gladly accept any future invitations extended to them.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning before the house was again silent, and after walking through the deserted apartments, and seeing that the lights were extinguished by the sleepy servants, Thorne took his way to his own room, expecting to find Claire asleep.

To his surprise and consternation, he saw that the bed was unoccupied, and he looked into the dressing-room thinking she might have lain down on the sofa till the noise and confusion in the house had subsided. She was not there, and his heart began to beat tumultuously, and fears of he knew not what, to assail him. He was about to ring the bell violently, when a letter addressed to himself caught his eye. It had been placed in a conspicuous spot upon a small stand drawn up near the sofa, and breathless with agitation and dread, he sunk down, tore it open, and by the light of the lamp which had been left burning in the room, he read the following lines :

"When you read these lines and understand what I have to tell you, you will execrate their writer. That is why I fly from your presence, for I do not choose to hear myself reviled, for compassing by management that justice which you would never of yourself have offered.

"I vainly appealed to you in favor of your repudiated wife—of her whose happiness was not alone destroyed, but her reputation attacked, and I made a vow to myself that I would bring home to you the retribution you merited, by deserting you in my turn when your hopes of happiness were at their culminating point.

"Do you begin to comprehend the game I have played against you? or is it necessary for me to an-

nounce myself to you in my true character? I have marveled at your blindness in the months of almost daily association which have passed since we last met. I know that time, and culture have greatly changed me from the impulsive child who won what you called your heart, but when I came hither to fascinate you anew, I had many fears that you would penetrate my incognita, and recoil from me as I feel assured you would, had you known me as your long-deserted wife. The name I assumed was but a translation of the one that lawfully belonged to me, as you would have known if you had been more familiar with the French language.

“I have never forfeited my right to bear it, nor considered myself free to give my hand to another, although you took to your heart the rival you temporarily deserted, that you might work me such woe as God nor man forgives.

“I vowed to reinstate myself in the eyes of the world; I waited through many years for the opportunity, and at last it came. How adroitly I availed myself of it you know, and to-morrow your dear “five hundred friends” will also know that the master of Thornhill has re-married his first wife to be forsaken by her in his turn. I have sent an article to the leading newspapers in L——, giving a brief account of this ‘romance in real life,’ that those who remember the shameful divorce trial, which cast me out upon the world with a tainted name, may know that the supposed paramour was your lawful wife and worthy to hold that position, or she would never have been elevated to it a second time.

“Your pride will suffer, and so perhaps, will your

heart, for *now* I believe that you truly love me. The boyish passion soon burned itself out, but that of the fully matured man will prove indelible, and thus I am avenged. All the tortures I have borne, will come home to you, and for a season at least, you will feel the intolerable burden of a vacant, and outraged heart.

“Through all the brilliant triumphs I have won in society, mine has lain like lead in my bosom, insensible to love, nursing but one strong passion, and that was the desire to bring home to you the suffering you had inflicted on me.

“If, since our last meeting, you had shown any remorse, or even regret for the past, I might have relented toward you, and spared you this humiliation in spite of my vow. But you plunged, with your usual selfish recklessness, into a violent passion for the supposed stranger, and refused to listen to my pleadings for myself. Though I left you to infer that your lost Rose would gladly renew the vows she had once plighted to you, you showed the most callous disregard to *her* wishes, and thought only of yourself. Had you been less hard, less egotistical, the result might have been very different. I should then have accepted the advice my best friend urged upon me, and have revealed myself to you in my true character, before our second union took place.

“It is too late now to speculate on what might have been; the hard and repulsive fact stares us in the face that we have mutually outraged each other to that degree that the angel of conciliation can scarcely interpose, and bid us forgive, and forget the bitter past. I have from your own lips the assertion that if reunited, we could never be happy together, and that decid-

ed me at the last to consummate my vengeance for the treachery of which I was once the victim.

“You were right in your supposition that Andrew Courtney had transferred to me the bond he held against you, but you drew from that fact an inference most degrading to me when you expressed your belief that I wished to secure a portion of the wealth from which I had refused to accept a support in my hour of direst need.

“I have exacted the payment of that debt that I might provide suitably for the daughter you were willing to impoverish that you might retain your own estate intact. The whole sum paid over by you, has been settled on May so securely that, even if she wished it, she cannot return any portion of it to you. My first design was to force you to pay the whole of it yourself, but when I found her happiness could only be purchased by the sacrifice of her fortune, I induced her to give it to you in the shape of a loan, which I pledged myself to repay in a few weeks. She accepted my verbal assurance, glad to find a justifiable means of evading her promise to her mother, but she understood nothing of the means I intended to adopt to secure repayment. Your daughter is a gentle and affectionate creature, and she will love you very dearly if you will permit her to do so ; but I fear that the bitterness of your heart will be poured out on her, and I rejoice that I have been instrumental in giving her a protector who will defend her from your wrath.

“Do not blame Mrs. Balfour for her apparent collusion with me. It is true that she was aware of my identity, but she had no right to betray it without my permission, and I allowed her to believe that after our

honeymoon was over I would seek a perfect reconciliation with you. She has throughout vehemently opposed my course of action and pointed out to me clearly enough the possible misery that might arise from it. I did not hearken to her reasonings, for I had already made up my mind that our reunion could only be temporary, and to be submitted to on my own part for the attainment of the purpose I had in view—to mete out to you what you had given to me.

“Our accounts are squared—I have bestowed on you one month of happiness in return for the one you gave me so long ago, and I bid you adieu. Several hours must intervene after my flight before it is discovered, and they will suffice to place me beyond your reach, even if you should desire to pursue me and force me to return to your house. After what I have told you, I scarcely think you will have the wish to proceed to such extreme measures, and I believe that I shall be allowed to go upon my way unsought and unmolested.

“CLAIRE R. L. THORNE.”

To depict the emotions with which the forsaken husband perused these lines would be impossible. He sat for many moments as if hardened into stone, motionless, colorless as if death had placed its chilling hand upon him, though a volcano of seething thought was maddening his brain. His pride, his affections were outraged in their most sensitive points, and he felt as if this last wrong to himself had exhausted his powers of endurance.

He had just been making such good resolutions—his new happiness had developed so much that was gentle and tender in the nature he had believed given

over to sterility, that he had hopes of redemption for himself from his worst faults through the influence of the woman to whom he had unquestionably given his whole heart.

His whole mature life passed in review before him, and he acknowledged that he merited this punishment, severe as it was, but it was bitter that the blow should have been dealt him by the hand of the woman to whom he had twice consecrated the devotion of his heart. She might have been the angel of his life, to lead him back into the paths of peace from which he had so long strayed ; but she had chosen to thrust him back upon his own hard and bitter self, and leave him to make the best of the broken hopes her reckless hand had shattered into fragments.

With a groan, Thorne sunk back, muttering :

“I could have forgiven her, I would have shrined her in my heart of hearts, and made her forget that early sin against her, if she had only allowed me the opportunity. Oh, Claire, Claire ! why could you not be generous enough to see that I was sinned against, even more than I sinned against you when I was forced to desert you ? You have, indeed, canceled your debt, for you have broken the proud and haughty heart you alone were destined to conquer.”

He shivered as if with an ague, yet his brain seemed on fire. As the hours passed on, he fancied that Agnes came to him and mocked him in his anguish ; then her face changed to that of Claire, and she hurled such reproaches at him as shriveled his heart and seared his brain. He prayed them both for pardon for all their wrongs, and shouted aloud in his agony when it was refused.

For many hours the worn out household was buried in sleep, and the maniacal cries that issued from that distant apartment were not heeded. Mrs. Benson at length came out to make her usual morning round and issue her orders to her satellites; the strange cries coming from Mr. Thorne's apartments struck upon her ears. She grew pale, and said to the housemaid who was with her:

"The master has gone mad—jest listen to them shouts—I allers thought suffin drefle would come from his marryin' that ere furrin madam, an' she's gone and made him a ragin' mainhack. Where's some o' the men folks? *I* can't abtrude in his department an' he a-goin' on that ere way. I shouldn't wonder ef he's found out something as she's gone an' done, an' he's killed her for it. When he's in one o' his rages, he'd do anything."

Betty rushed away in a violent panic at this suggestion, and striking loudly upon the door of Mr. Balfour's room, called out:

"Oh, sir, come an' see what's the matter with Mr. Thorne. He's a goin' on awful, an' Miss Benson says he's gone and murdered the mistis."

Mr. Balfour had nearly completed his toilette, and he opened the door with an alarmed face, while his wife sprang from the bed and threw a dressing-gown around her. With great effort, she said:

"Let us go and see what is the matter. I apprehended an explosion when the truth was told, but nothing so terrible as this girl suggests can have occurred."

They hurried toward Thorne's room, and entered it to find him walking to and fro with the fatal letter clutched

in his hands ; and, as he reached the wall at either extremity of his promenade, he struck his head with violence against it. His eyes were flaming, and the hair, which on the previous night had scarcely been threaded with gray, was partially whitened by the shock he had received.

When he saw Mrs. Balfour, he shook the open letter violently at her and shrieked :

“ She is gone—*gone* from me forever ! you might have warned me in time to prevent her escape ; you might have told her how I clung to her when she was laid low with illness brought on by the baseness I was forced to commit ; but you would not—you let her enter my heart and my home as a thief to steal away my life and my reason. I hope your sense of justice is satisfied now, Ada Digby, for I am a bankrupt in everything—*everything* ! ”

With the last word he fell to the floor as suddenly as if he had been shot ; and the paper he had so tenaciously grasped fell from his relaxing fingers.

By this time the servants had begun to collect in the room, and with the assistance of one of the men Thorne was lifted by Mr. Balfour and placed upon the sofa. He hastily gave orders to have Dr. Brandon summoned as quickly as possible, and sat down beside the sufferer to keep guard over him in case he should revive before the physician appeared.

His wife had eagerly glanced around both rooms in the faint hope that Claire might be found crouching away to escape the fury of her husband ; but, finding no trace of her, she took up the letter Thorne had dropped and glanced over the opening sentences, in the hope that they would afford some clue to the scene before her.

After reading the first and last paragraphs, she understood what had happened; but what to do in so unlooked for a crisis she did not know; even her practical sense failed to suggest a remedy for the evil a bitter and resentful spirit had led Claire to consummate. She dismissed the gaping servants, sending one of them to request Sinclair to come to her, but forbidding the messenger to give a hint of the state of affairs to May.

Mrs. Balfour then drew near her husband, and said: "Walter has spoken the truth. Claire is gone, Heaven knows where; and the shock of learning that she has married him only to desert him, has brought him to this condition. Oh, if I had only understood her purpose, I would have defeated it at all hazards. If I had thought she did not intend to try and make him happy, I would have told him all; but she has deceived me as she did him."

"My dear Ada, do not take blame to yourself for what you could not foresee or provide against. Who could have believed that any woman would be so reckless as to crush her own heart to bring retribution home to the one she knew she ruled over? Claire loves her husband—I am sure she does, in spite of this mad escapade, and we must have her sought and brought back to him."

Mrs. Balfour drearily shook her head: "I thought so, too, but now I believe that all that show of affection was assumed to win him entirely over, that the blow, when struck, might tell with stunning effect. It has almost destroyed him, but if she *could* be brought back, I scarcely think it would be advisable to attempt it without Walter's consent. He might

resent any such effort on our part when he recovers sufficiently to understand what we had done. No—if these two are ever brought in accord again, it will not be through the intervention of others, but by the mutual conviction that, faulty as each one may be, they were made for each other, and cannot live apart.”

“But if she is not followed promptly, she may conceal herself so effectually that no clue to her retreat can be found.”

“If they are to be reunited, fate will accomplish it without any intervention on our part. If Walter could go in pursuit of her in person, he might induce her to return; but any other messenger would fail.”

Sinclair here joined them in a state of great agitation. He had learned the fact of Mrs. Thorne's flight, but was unable to account for it in any way till Mrs. Balfour briefly explained to him the actual position of affairs. When this was done, he concurred with her in opinion as to the impossibility of inducing Claire to retrace her steps, and come back to apologize for her wild freak, and make such peace with her imperious lord as would be possible under the circumstances.

He was ready to go in pursuit of her; and, if found, inform her of the condition in which Thorne lay; but he believed she would never consent to return unless assured of full and loving forgiveness on the part of her husband. As it was uncertain what Thorne's wishes would be, the three reluctantly came to the conclusion that it would be best to do nothing till he was in a condition to make his will known.

He had partially revived, but he lay helpless and inert, his eyes roving wildly from object to object, but evidently without recognizing them; and the only

sound that issued from his lips was a faint moaning which seemed like the word, *Gone, gone*, repeated over and over. Dr. Brandon came promptly ; and, after examining the condition of the patient, he pronounced him suffering from a temporary attack of mania. It might pass away in a few days, or the shock he had received might prolong it for weeks or months. All depended on the vigor of the brain and the condition of the nervous system, but in no event did he apprehend confirmed derangement. Thorne's recovery might be slow, but he would eventually walk among men again in the full possession of all his mental faculties.

We pass over the dismay and anguish of May when she was informed of the condition of her father and its cause. She devoted herself unceasingly to him ; and at the end of a few weeks she joyfully perceived that his mind began perceptibly to regain its balance.

As the invalid slowly recovered the power of thought and action it was evident that the Walter Thorne of other days was dead, and a new man had arisen in his place. He was gentle, considerate for others, and grateful for the loving attentions lavished on him by his child. One of his first requests was to see the minister of the church in which he had been confirmed, the ordinance making him a nominal Christian, at least ; and after many earnest conversations with him Mr. Thorne expressed the conviction that he was a changed man.

Those around him believed this, also, for he was yielding on every point save one : he would not listen to any proposals to seek Claire ; he only said :

“ It is too late now. If she could have been wrought

on to believe that I love her, that I have never loved any other than herself, it must have been done immediately after her flight. I was not in a condition to pursue her, but she is not aware of that. If God accepts my repentance he will yet restore to me the darling of my life, for he knows how much I need her."

Mrs. Balfour wrote to Virginia in her hope that Mrs. Courtney could inform her of Claire's whereabouts. The reply came, and she learned from it that she had made a brief visit to the friends of her youth, but had not informed them of her reunion with her husband, and its abrupt termination by her own flight. Mrs. Courtney stated that she seemed greatly depressed, and was evidently waiting for some news that was of vital importance to her; but, as the days went by without bringing what she hoped for, her spirits sunk still lower, and at the end of ten days she suddenly left them with the avowed intention of embarking for Europe, though she explicitly said she should not again make Paris her place of abode.

When this was communicated to Thorne, he languidly said:

"She expected me to seek her there. I could not do it, and now all that remains to me is to wait and hope. I will write to her Parisian address as soon as I am able, and if I do not hear from her, I will go to Europe when I think her resentful feelings have had time to cool. I think we are fairly quits now, and we can begin to build our future on a new and better foundation."

May did not take possession of her new home as soon as she anticipated. She remained with her father

through the autumn and winter, and a strong and tender affection grew up between them. Sinclair visited Philadelphia a few times, but he spent the greater portion of his time at Thornhill in the companionship of his wife and her father. They formed a very united family, and but for the absence of the mistress of the place, as perfect happiness as earth affords might have been found there.

Mr. Balfour and his family removed to Philadelphia in November, and took possession of the beautiful place he had purchased not very far from the cottage home of Sinclair.

When spring opened no reply had come from Claire, and Thorne grew restless and sick with hope deferred. He made preparations for his contemplated tour, and in May set out on the quest on which he had determined.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HUSBAND'S SEARCH.

WALTER THORNE sailed on a French packet, and after a pleasant voyage landed at Havre on the evening of a bright day in the latter part of May. He went on to Paris immediately, and commenced his inquiries for his lost wife as soon as it was possible to do so.

Mrs. Balfour had furnished him with all the information in her possession which could be a guide to him. Thorne called on the former partner of M. Latour, but from him he could learn nothing, beyond the fact that

Claire had resumed the name by which she had been so long known, and had set out on a tour which she declared would be of indefinite length.

Latour was let to strangers, and the income derived from that and her other resources was forwarded to a banking house in Geneva as it fell due. Beyond that the firm knew nothing of Madame L'Epine or her movements.

Furnished with this meagre clue Thorne set out for Switzerland, determined to find his wife, and to be reconciled to her, if such a thing were possible. When he reached Geneva he lost no time in calling on Messrs. Hoffner to furnish him with the present address of Madame L'Epine, but this they declined doing, as that lady had expressly prohibited them from betraying her retreat to any friend who might seek to penetrate the seclusion in which she chose to bury herself.

After a struggle with himself Thorne confided to the head of the firm the fact of his marriage with Claire, and her elopement from his house on account of a misunderstanding which he was most anxious to correct. He declared his conviction that, if a personal interview could be obtained, he had no doubt that a perfect reconciliation would ensue.

The white-haired man listened to him with sympathetic attention, but he declared that the pledge he had given to Madame L'Epine to keep the secret of her retreat must remain inviolate. The utmost he could do was to name the country in which she had taken up her abode. She had gone to Italy with the purpose of remaining there several years. The point to which her letters were sent he would not indicate, but if Mr. Thorne was in earnest he would traverse the peninsula, and in some isolated nook he would find his wife.

Thorne inquired if Hoffner would forward a letter to Claire from himself. To this the banker consented, and he wrote such an appeal as he thought must move her if she had ever really loved him. He entreated her to return to him, and they would commence their life anew. He declared his nature to be entirely changed—that he had repented of his former actions, and he believed his repentance had been accepted at a higher tribunal than that of earth.

It was a manly and affectionate letter, but it was destined never to reach the hands for which it was designed, as the writer afterward learned. When weeks lapsed into months and no reply came, Thorne felt almost disheartened; but it was characteristic of Walter Thorne that what he tenaciously desired to possess he would never give up; and he set out on a pilgrimage which led him through every nook and corner of the classic land which he had often dreamed of exploring, but never with so sick a heart as he now bore within him.

He avoided the large cities, or only spent a few days in them when they lay upon his route. He rested in every secluded hamlet with any pretensions to picturesque beauty, and finally took up his old character of a wandering artist. He filled his portfolio with studies from nature, and the employment served to distract his mind from the weary doubts and hopes that alternately filled it.

Thorne remained long enough in each hamlet to satisfy himself that no one answering to the description of Claire was to be found in it; and as months lapsed into years he began almost to despair of success in his quest.

Two years had passed away in this unsatisfactory manner, and letters from home urged him to return, and give up the hope of ever being reunited to a woman who seemed determined to evade all his efforts to find her. May wrote to him of her beautiful boy who bore his name, and entreated him to return to the children who would do all that was possible to render his life happy and contented.

Thorne reflected on the contents of this letter, and finally concluded that, after so many disappointments, it was useless to prolong his fruitless search. He had explored Italy very thoroughly, but he was unwilling to leave Europe without seeing the mountain scenery of Switzerland.

It was again summer, and he was glad to turn his steps from the land of the sun and find some green Alpine valley in which he could rest from his weary wanderings and reconcile his desolate soul to the future that lay before him. Claire was lost to him forever, and he must reconcile himself as well as he could to live without her.

Thorne joined a party of Americans whose acquaintance he accidentally made, and entered the valley of Grindenwald, after descending the Wengern Alps. He made sketches of the grand scenery, and tried to interest himself in the sublime aspects of nature, but his old fire seemed to have deserted him; the one hope that had so long sustained him had died out of his heart, and he felt as if nothing was now left that was worth living for.

Finding the society of the gay party of travelers insupportable, in his present frame of mind, he separated from them, and employing a guide, went on alone

through the pass of Brunig to the picturesque valley of Meyrenge. Enclosed in two parallel ranges of hills, fringed with numerous cascades, the spray of which glitters white in the bright sunshine, the green vale lay placid and dreamlike in the clasp of the snow-clad mountains which rise above each other in a seemingly endless panorama. At the farther end, enclosed by a rampart of mountains, is the Lake of Brienze, and it was this which had chiefly attracted Walter Thorne to the spot.

For several nights in succession he had dreamed of this sheet of water. He thought that Agnes came to him, and said, "I forgive you, Walter, for all you made me suffer, and I bless you for giving happiness to my child. I will reward you by indicating where you had better go if you would regain what you have lost. Seek the green vale in which the Lake of Brienze is found."

Thorne paid little attention to this dream at first, for in his visions Agnes had often visited him since her death. But when it was repeated night after night, and he would awake with the last words seemingly ringing in his ears, "Seek the green vale in which the Lake of Brienze is found," he began to attach some importance to it.

He reached it with a faint gleam of hope in his heart, but that died out as day after day passed: he had explored every accessible spot—visited the falls of Griesbach, and filled his portfolio with sketches—yet among the tourists he encountered he found no one that reminded him of his lost Claire.

Execrating his own credulity in placing faith in a dream, Thorne prepared to depart, more depressed

than ever; but he thought he would take one more moonlight row upon the placid waters of the lake.

The night was clear and starlit; the small boat was rowed by a single man, and Thorne, buried in sad reverie, reclined upon the seat. Other parties were also on the lake, and for them the Alp horn was blown, its wild notes floating over the still waters, and echoed back in elfin sounds from the everlasting hills.

Thorne raised his head and bade the oarman cease rowing, that he might thoroughly enjoy the effect. They had crossed the lake, and were floating in the shadow of the cliffs—nestled among them was a small cottage, almost covered with trailing vines. A balcony that overhung the water jutted out from its side, and a lady dressed in white stood upon it, holding a small child in her arms.

Thorne was so near that he could hear the imperfect speech of the child, as he uttered his rapturous delight in the weird music made by the distant horn, though he could not distinguish the low tones of the mother. Both spoke in his native tongue, and he concluded that the picturesque cottage had been chosen by some English family as a temporary home.

Suddenly there was a scream and a plash, and he saw that the boy had sprung from his mother's arms into the lake below. Thorne was a strong swimmer, and it was the work of a moment to throw aside his coat, and plunge in after the infant. When he rose to the surface, the child was within a few feet of him, and without much effort he drew the tiny, struggling form in his strong arms, and struck out for a flight of stone steps, which led down to the water.

From the moment a preserver appeared the lady's

shrieks had ceased, for she saw that her darling would be saved. She rushed into the house, seized a lamp that burned upon a table, and hurried to the platform above the lake stairs.

The mother did not once look at the man who had performed this inestimable service for her, for she had neither eyes nor ears save for the small morsel of humanity he carried in his arms. Her hair had fallen over her face, but the sound of her voice thrilled to his soul as she exclaimed :

“Oh, my baby-love, my darling, precious child ! how shall I ever repay you, sir, for saving his dear, little life ? Without him, I should have nothing to live for ; he is my all—*my all* !” Still, without glancing at the dripping figure before her, she snatched the child to her breast, and placing the lamp in Thorne’s hand, went on. “Come in, sir ; I cannot let you cross the lake in your wet garments. I must know who has made me his debtor for life. Ah ! I can never express to you the gratitude that fills my heart.”

While thus speaking, she was caressing and quieting her child, and the three entered the principal apartment of the cottage before Thorne found voice or courage to utter a word. His heart was throbbing as if it would burst from his bosom, and his lips seemed glued together.

Suddenly the child stretched his arms toward his preserver, and said :

“Papa—papa ! Muvver, he tum—don’t you see he tum !”

Thorne snatched him to his heart with one hand, and throwing the other arm around his mother, fervently said :

“Yes, I have come to claim you both, for you belong to me, and I will have my own. Oh, Claire, my love, my darling, my long-sought wife, how could you sever yourself from me so long? How could you conceal from me the birth of our son, for this boy is mine—he is a miniature of myself—and you have taught him to know me, too.”

He might have talked on long without interruption, for Claire had fainted on his breast.

At this crisis a servant-girl came running into the room, frightened half out of her wits at the account of the accident given her by the boatman, who was tranquilly awaiting the return of his passenger at the bottom of the steps.

Thorne gave her the child, briefly saying:

“I am the husband of your mistress, so you may leave me to restore her from her swoon. Change the boy's clothes immediately, and do not return here till you are summoned.”

The girl looked doubtfully at him, but when she saw the strong resemblance between himself and the child he held out to her, she no longer questioned the truth of his words. She took the little one and went without a word to perform the duty delegated to her.

Thorne laid his precious burden upon a wide divan that stood against the wall, and kneeling beside her, kissed her pale lips and sealed eyelids till she awoke to consciousness, at the same time murmuring words of such tender endearment as told her how fondly she was still beloved.

Claire listened to them with closed eyes a few moments after her senses had perfectly returned; then suddenly lifting herself, she threw her arms around his neck and faintly said:

“The service you have this night rendered me cancels all the past. Let us exchange forgiveness, Walter, for I know now that you love me, and through all, my heart has clung to you. But for my child I must have died in the isolation to which I had condemned myself; but he was given me as a precious consolation; and you have saved him to me—you, whom I so dreaded to encounter, lest you should tear him from me and refuse to take me back after the dreadful ruse I played against you.”

For many moments Thorne clasped her to his panting bosom, while tears flowed from his eyes upon her dishevelled hair. At length he held her from him and solemnly said:

“I swear to you by the Eternal goodness that has restored you to me, to make amends for all the unhappiness I have caused you. Refuse to take you back, Claire! Have I not sought you for two years past? Have I not yearned to clasp you to my heart, and breathe out all the love and remorse that filled it? I have asked of Heaven but one boon, and that was, to restore to me my lost darling, and soften her resentful nature till she fully and freely forgives me. That God has accepted my late repentance I now know, for he has granted my prayer.”

“And I too have much to be forgiven,” whispered the voice which sounded to him as the sweetest music he had ever heard. “I left you, Walter, with a breaking heart, and I lingered among my friends in Virginia, hoping that you would follow me and take me to your heart again. When you did not come I returned to Europe and buried myself in Southern Italy. There my child was born, and a few weeks afterward I

vaguely learned, through my banker, that you were in pursuit of me. I thought then it was too late for a reconciliation. You had not sought me when you might, and I dreaded that you only wished to take from me my only treasure, and leave me to the desolation I merited. It was a foolish fear I now know, but I acted on it. I removed from place to place, and finally came hither for change of air for little Walter. I have been here but a few weeks, and but for the accident of to-night we might never have met again."

"But my last letter, Claire—did not that reassure you?"

"I have never had a line from you since the day we parted. Orders were left both in Paris and Geneva to forward my letters if any came for me; in two years I have had but one, and that was from Mrs. Courtnay. She wrote to me that Mrs. Balfour had endeavored to learn from her where I was to be found, but she gave me no reason to suppose that you instigated the inquiry. If you were interested in it, why did you delegate the task of writing to another?"

"I did not do so. Mrs. Balfour wrote without consulting me, for I was not in a condition to attend to anything. I will not pain your heart, Claire, by telling you how much I suffered when I learned that a second time I had lost the angel of my life—the last time through no fault of my own. I believe I should not have had the courage to live on, if I had not discovered that you took away with you the colored photograph of myself which hung in your dressing-room. That assured me that I held a warm place in your heart in spite of your flight. You dreaded my reproaches when I learned your identity, but you need

not have done so. I should have loved you all the better for knowing that I had a double right to do so."

"I did not comprehend the strength of the tie that binds me to you, Walter, or I should never have left you. I repented that I had not stayed, and borne the heaviest burden of your wrath. I married you a second time that I might inflict on you as deep anguish as you had once made my portion; but day by day my heart awoke from its long torpor to find that I had only laid a snare for my own feet. I loved you as deeply as in those early days in the valley, but I had dug a pit between you and myself, which I thought could not be bridged over. When I fled, I took the picture you refer to, that I might at least possess a shadow of yourself. I have taught our boy to know it, and call it papa, and that is how he came to recognize you to-night."

"The dear little fellow! Let us have him back, that I may caress him, and realize how happy I am to be the father of a living son, and that child yours."

"I will call his nurse, but you are wet through. You must first change your clothes. Fortunately the courier who traveled with me when I came here left a suit of linen to be done up for him by the time I should need his services again. You can borrow that, and have your own things dried."

"And the boatman must be dismissed, as I shall leave this retreat no more till I can remove my treasures with me."

The man accepted the explanation given him in stolid silence. He pocketed the liberal gratuity offered him with a chuckle of satisfaction, and went upon his way. In half an hour Thorne had changed his dress, and was again in the sitting-room with Claire beside

him, and his son upon his knee. The little fellow showed no shyness toward him; and, as he kissed his father and pulled his whiskers, he often repeated:

“Papa tum: ma no ky now.”

Claire blushed, and explained:

“I often wept when I showed your picture to him; and when he could first speak, he would ask me, ‘What for you ky?’ I always told him, because papa would never come to us. He knew you at once, though your hair is grayer and your face sadder than in the image I stole away.”

“My face will brighten now, my love, for it will reflect the ‘peace that passeth understanding’ which reigns in my heart.”

The remainder of the summer was passed in the cottage, in which the reunion of Thorne and his wife took place. They spent two more years in traveling through the most interesting portions of Europe, and then returned to their native land to be joyfully welcomed by the friends who heard of their meeting and its result with unfeigned thankfulness. Neither of them wished to live at Thornhill; so the place was sold, and a new and beautifully embellished home purchased near Philadelphia. But Mr. Thorne and his wife visited the place once before it passed into the hands of strangers, and he showed her the portrait and roll of hair he had so sacredly guarded. Claire, with tears brimming in her eyes, said:

“Ah, if I had seen *these*, I could never have carried out my vengeance!”

THE END.

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
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
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
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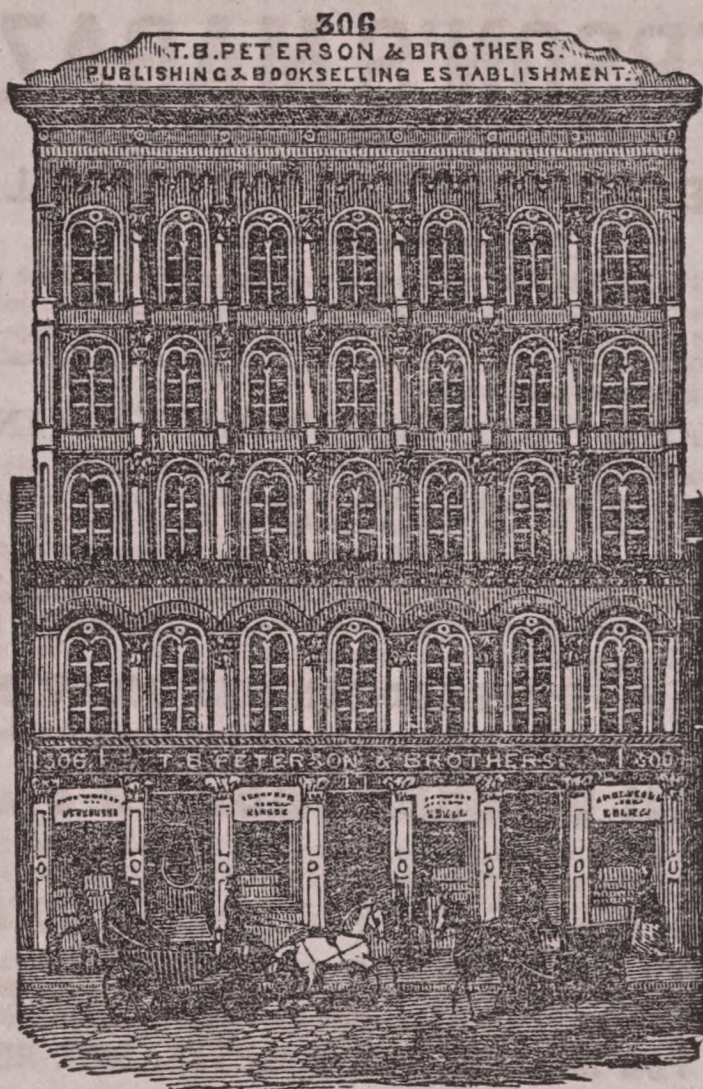
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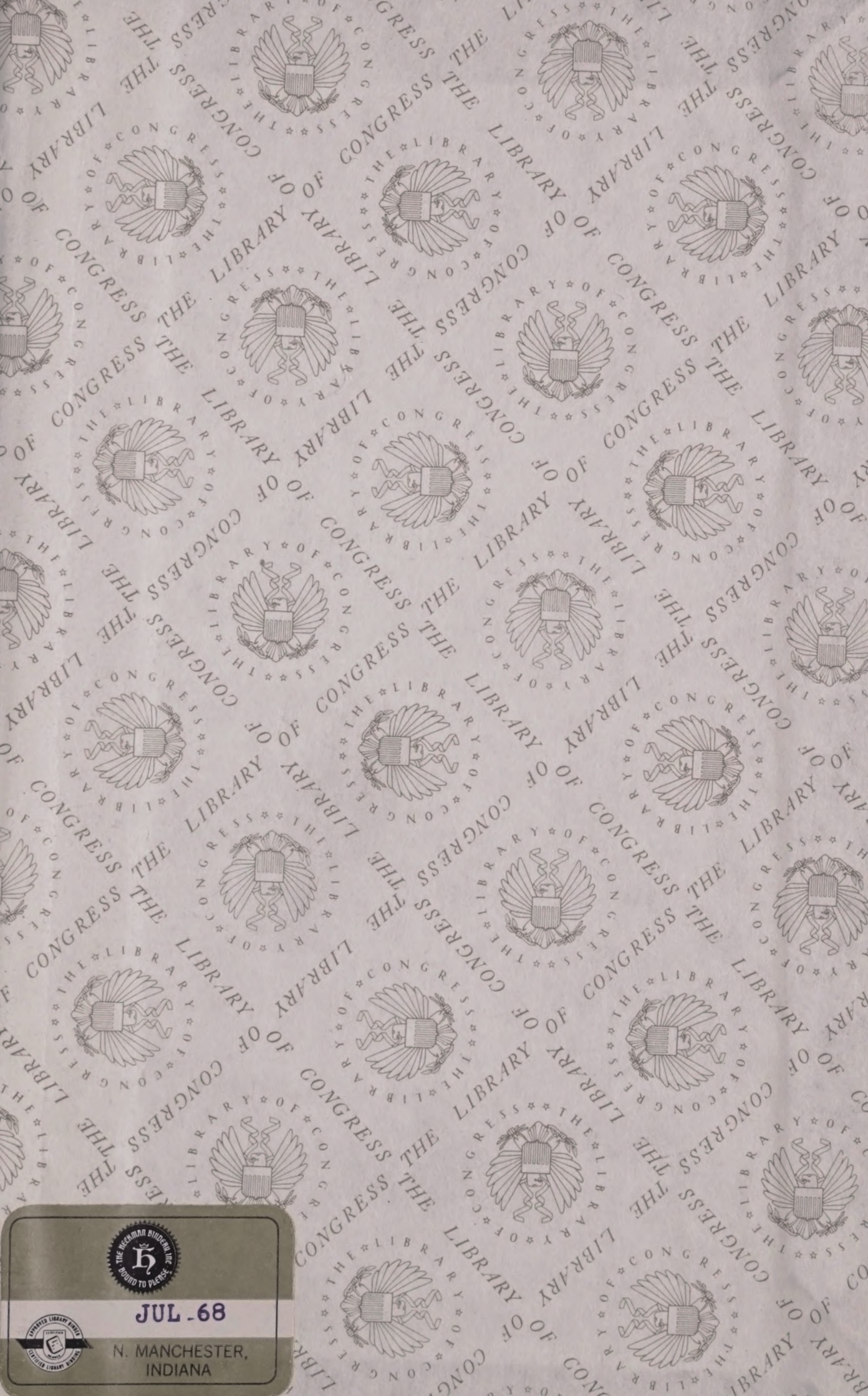
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